Willowdale

Kerry Wood

WILLOWDALE

By

KERRY WOOD

METROPOLITAN
FICTION
RESERVE

THIS is a delightfully vivid picture of life in a small prairie town. In a series of skilfully drawn sketches the author introduces the reader to a truly extraordinary collection of characters who are drawn from life in the true sense of the term. Although they live within sight of the Canadian Rockies, you have probably met their counterparts in small towns everywhere.

We meet Booker John, who had a heart of gold and a love of nature; a homely philosopher who wouldn't do a day's work. There is Gally, the town drunk, who was in his cups every night of the week except Wednesdays and Sundays. On Sunday he attended church; on Wednesday he visited a spinster friend and enjoyed Chopin.

There is the Reverend Mr. Tanner who became star pitcher on the baseball team in order to raise funds for his church; the gardener who landscaped the town in his spare time in order to pay a debt to his fellow-men, and because he liked things to look nice; and there is Ma Harder, a matriarchal terror about whom the author says: "When Ad Harder's mother sickened, he fetched Martha Betts from a city orphan home to nurse the old lady during her final days. But Ma Harder got interested in bossing the shy girl, so she put off dying for eleven years." There is Mike O'Flyn who went to jail

[*continued on back flap*

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WILLOWDALE

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WILLOWDALE

By
KERRY WOOD

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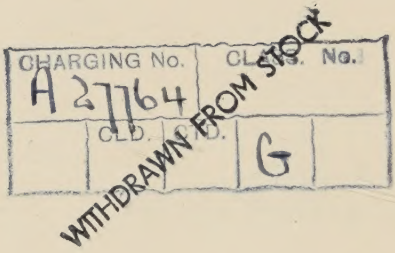
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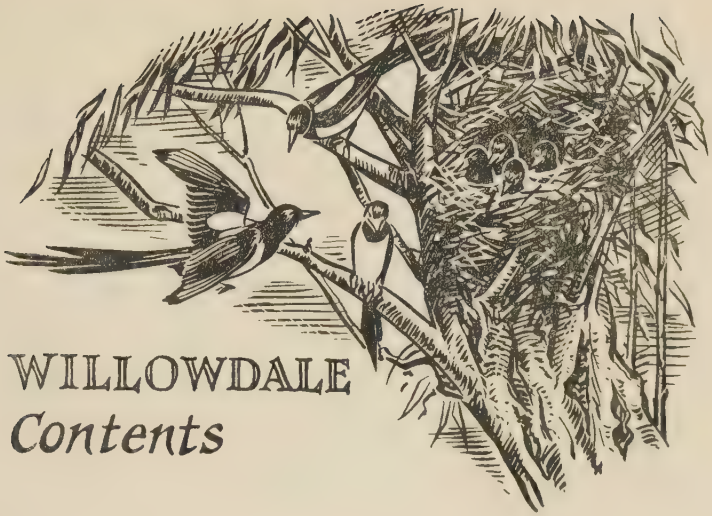

WILLOWDALE
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I

New Church

"NO!" snapped the Widow Masters. "Not another cent!" Prentice Tanner hated begging for church funds, but this time his jaw had a stubborn thrust to it as he tackled Willowdale's wealthiest citizen one summer evening.

"No!" she repeated, rising from her porch chair with every one of her several chins set just as firmly as the young minister's jaw. "And you can't call me mean, either. You know very well that I've twice before given you thumping big donations to that new church."

"The money got side-tracked." Tanner tried to

sound patient as he took his hat from her thrusting hand. "The congregation voted to give all our first savings to that emergency flood relief. Then, when the mill fire burned out three families, the second fund provided them with new homes. You voted in favour, too, and I'm proud we acted as we did with that money. But the time has come when we simply must have a new building. Ours is the oldest church in town and much too small for the enlarged congregation. It has no basement nor hall for holding general meetings, there's no Sunday School room of any kind, nor any place where young folk can hold socials."

"You said all that before," Mrs. Masters reminded him as she bustled down the cement walk. "I don't want to miss the ball game, so if you want to do any more talking you'll have to do it while I walk to the Town Square."

"Well, I'd like to review——"

"You've already reviewed," interjected the Widow. "I agree we need a new church. My suggestion is that you have the women hold Saturday afternoon teas, sales of home cooking, and special bazaars. If we earn the money that way, we'll appreciate the new church all the more when we get it."

Reverend Tanner tried to contain his annoyance.

"In a small town the size of Willowdale it would take us twenty years to raise money that way. Surely you know that?"

"Well, I'll tell you here and now that I don't approve of unearned handouts," Mrs. Masters retorted, increasing her pace as she heard a cheer from the region

of the Square. "Oh, drat—! Why did you come to-night, of all times? I wanted to see this Vicksburg-Willowdale game, and it must be half over by now."

"I'd like to have seen it too," the minister muttered, then raised his voice. "If you'd just remember how your late husband felt about us having a new church——"

"No!" cried the stout lady, starting to puff.

"I'm not asking for a finished building," Tanner pleaded. "If you'd help us get the materials, I'll be glad to build the church with my own hands."

He unconsciously flexed his lean, hard muscles while reviewing again the price of lumber, of cement, bricks, windows, and doors. It all added up to several thousand dollars more than his congregation could afford, while this one person could easily spare the whole total and more.

"Think of the young people," the minister urged her, just as they reached the Square.

"I am thinking of them," replied Mrs. Masters. "I've been thinking of 'em all evening and wanting to come here and watch them play ball. Now that I'm finally here, I'm going to watch 'em without any more fuss and bother about discussing a new church, so good evening!"

She pushed through the fringe of the crowd and left the minister to stare gloomily after her and realize how dismally his errand had failed.

"Hi, Pop!" a youthful voice greeted him.

Reverend Tanner came out of his despairing blues

to see his son Morton brandishing a catcher's mitt several sizes too large for him.

"Hello, son. How's the game going?"

"Aw, we're sunk. Vicksburg piled up seven runs to our three. It's the last half o' the seventh innings, and we're at bat."

"Well, it could still be anybody's ball game," commented the minister as he snapped up a hand to catch the ball that young Morton threw at him.

"Not a chance, Pop. There's two batters out a'ready." Morton sounded cheerfully depressed over the game's fate. "Hey, Pop—soak one in, huh? I got Dooley Harper's real catcher's mitt on, so let 'er rip!"

"That is you, then, behind all that leather," smiled the parson, taking a step backward while fingering the ball into position. "Well, son; hold it where you want it."

Morton hunched down in the approved style of big league catchers, bracing himself sturdily as he fanned the mitt wide open. The minister executed a couple of hops while his right arm whirled, then his whole body suddenly leaned into that straightening arm as the ball streaked away. There was a bullet-like smack and Morton fell over backwards. He bounced up at once.

"Wow! Golly, Pop; that stung like the teacher's strap! Clear through Dooley's big mitt, too."

"I'm sorry, son," apologized the father. "I keep forgetting your small size."

"Try me for size," interjected Dooley Harper, grinning at the minister. "That pitch looked super,

Reverend. Gimme the mitt, Morton— Now, then, sir : pelt me a whizzer like that."

The ball flicked out and once again Reverend Tanner automatically reached out and caught it. He saw that Dooley had been joined by Cap Riley of the Willowdale team, the Cap being attracted by the solid smack of that fast ball. A few spectators at the edge of the crowd had turned from watching the game to stare at the black-suited clergyman who was fingering the baseball and looking embarrassed.

" Really, now," demurred the minister.

" Go ahead, Pop," urged Morton. " Pitch 'im your steamer ! "

Prentice Tanner knew that this was not the prescribed behaviour for a cleric, but he was still worked up about his quarrel with the Widow Masters. He'd got rid of some of his resentment by throwing that fast ball to young Morton. And now— Finally he smiled down at his son and suddenly made the two absurd hops, his right arm flashing out. The ball became a blur, then slammed into the pocket of the catcher's mitt.

" Ouch ! " yelled Dooley, wringing his catching hand. " Jumpin' jellyfish, that stung ! That's the fastest ball I ever caught— Hey, where'd you learn that kind o' pitching, Reverend ? "

" My Pop was a champeen pitcher at college," Morton reported, with enormous pride of his parent. " Me and him, we practise catchin' and pitchin' every day out behind our garden. But I can't hold 'em when Pop cuts loose with fast balls."

Cap Riley heard a groan go up from the crowd and knew that Jimmy Todd had fanned out. The Cap was Willowdale's only pitcher and also the team's captain. Cap was noted for his hunches, and perhaps that was why he suddenly advanced on the minister.

"Look, Parson: we need a spare pitcher in the worst way. I got me a lame arm, so all my control is shot. How's about you spelling me off for an inning or two, huh?"

"Oh, no!" protested Tanner, shocked at the very idea.

"Please do it, sir," coaxed Dooley Harper, readily falling in with the Cap's plan.

"No, I just couldn't." The minister shook his head.

"Sure you could, Pop," Morton declared. "Cap Riley's been giving home runs for free to them Vicksburg guys, all because o' that sore arm of his. Honest, Pop—you couldn't be any worse'n him whatever you did!"

The cleric laughed, looking down at the earnest young face of his son, who meant his sour words to sound sweet. Dooley Harper was Tanner's good friend; for that matter, so was Cap Riley. In fact, he knew every player on the team; he also knew of their many defeats by the Vicksburg boys. Reverend Tanner remembered offers from big league scouts made to him while he had been at college; they had mentioned money sums that had sounded fantastically large as they tried to coax him to give up ministry plans and become a professional ball player. He'd

kept that part of the past carefully under wraps since being ordained, but the old spirit of the game returned to tempt him at times. And with a sigh for his own vanity despite his greying temples, the minister knew that he could still do a great deal better on the pitching mound than Cap Riley at his best. Hence he permitted himself to yield to their coaxings and handed his black hat and jacket to Morton.

"Now, then," the minister said to Dooley as he rolled up his shirt sleeves. "What signals are you using?"

The crowd was amazed when the clergyman walked self-consciously out to the mound. Willowdale people who knew the parson applauded politely, but not without some diffidence. A buzzing of whispers went around the bleachers. Whatever had got into Cap Riley, sending a preacher to do a pitcher's job? Even the Willowdale team looked embarrassed as they trotted out to playing positions to support the new substitute, for most of them were unaware of the brief demonstration of the minister's skill that had been witnessed by Dooley and Cap.

Naturally, the Vicksburg nine talked it up fast and rough.

"Come to preach us a sermon, Reverend?"

"How's about a hymn to start with, Parson?"

"Get out the hat, boys—we'll take up a collection for the new pitcher!"

The clergyman began to wish he had not accepted this dubious honour. Catcalls became even more

ribald, while his own Willowdale crowd stayed ominously quiet. Only Cap Riley and Dooley tried to shout down the Vicksburg jeering, aided by a boy rooter named Morton. The jeers drowned out this minority support ; Tanner licked his dry lips and felt clammy sweat on his palms. He was in the grip of the worst case of stage-fright he had ever known.

" Stick to preachin' ! "

" G'wan back to your pulpit ! "

" Better start prayin', Reverend, 'cause we're gonna slaughter you ! "

Chief of Police Tom David was referee and delayed the game long enough to give the new pitcher a chance for a few warm-up throws. Everyone hushed, even the rival players, the first time the cleric lopped the ball over to Dooley Harper. But there was no speed nor break of curve nor any trickery on any of the three throws allowed, so the cat-calling grew louder again.

" Play ball ! " ordered the Chief.

Jeff Cousins, the raw-boned giant of the Vicksburg nine, strode confidently to the batter's position and grinned mockingly at the nervous minister.

" Just put one over the collection plate, Rev, and see what I donate ! "

Tanner watched while Dooley Harper signalled for the fast throw. He was tempted to shake his head in refusal, wondering if he could deliver the ball anywhere near the catcher's mitt. As he hesitated and fingered the sphere, the cleric felt a tremor in his hand and fervently wished that he could go quietly and

quickly away from there. At that unhappy moment a strong, authoritative voice rang out :

" Do it for the church, Parson ! "

He recognized that voice. It belonged to the Widow Masters, and no doubt she was thoroughly enjoying his discomfiture. As he recalled his recent fight with her over funds for the new church, anger mounted again in the clergyman. And to complete the cure of his nerve jitters, he heard young Morton shrill out :

" Get 'im for me, Pop ! "

The minister shuffled his two queer hops, straightening his arm like a whiplash. The ball smoked through the air and smacked Dooley's mitt before Jeff Cousins could stop smiling.

" Ssssssstrike ! " yelled the Chief.

There was a sudden, tense silence among crowd and players. Dooley yelled " Atta-boy ! " as he returned the ball. Without pausing a second, the minister hopped again and flashed his arm straight. Jeff swung, but his bat came into hitting position after the ball was stinging Dooley's hand through the thick mitt.

" Sssssssstrike Two ! "

Willowdale's team came awake with a roaring cheer. The startled Vicksburg boys howled vindictively and intensified their anti-cleric campaign. Jeff Cousins set himself for fast action. Reverend Tanner made his ridiculous twin hops and his arm straightened. Jeff struck with all his energy and as swiftly as possible. But the ball drifted slowly towards the plate. Jeff's vicious swing was all over when the baseball seemed to float leisurely past his frustrated scowl.

"Three and Out!" yelled Chief David, trying valorously to keep the home-town triumph from sounding in his shout.

"Sonavagun!" jubilated Pete Popovitch, the plumber who played first base. "Whaddayuh know about that, huh?"

The crowd came stamping to its feet, thundering out a long cheer. Tanner was grateful for their swift acceptance of him and savoured again the old magic of the beloved game. He threw the ball over to Pete, who snapped it on to short-stop and it sailed across to third base before lopping back into the minister's glove.

"We're with yuh, Parson!" yelled Al the garage-man.

"Sock 'er in there, Mister!" howled Jimmy Todd.

It was the Vicksburg batter who was the nervous man this time. He swung fast for a slow ball, reached for a curve that easily eluded him, then became wary and rested his bat while the Reverend threw his speed ball right down the middle.

"Two down!" shouted Chief David. Dooley Harper executed a jig step, all the way out to the pitcher's mound.

"Boyoboy!" crooned Dooley. "You got 'em rattled sick, Reverend, and this next batter is a lunk-head from away back. He can't hit nothin', so just do what seems easiest and we'll sew up the inning."

The lunk-head let two pitches count against him. Then he closed his eyes and swung and struck the top of the cleric's fast ball. The pill went bouncing across

the field at high speed, missed by the short-stop and letting the lunk-head romp to second base before fielder Cressman got his glove on the ball and slung it in.

"Yah! Yah!" whooped the Vicksburg team. "Now we got your number! You better go back to preachin', Reverend."

The Willowdale team rallied strong, and loudly defended their new champion.

"That's just an accident! We're with you, Parson—Never mind that one and we'll get the next!"

The Vicksburg batter advanced to the plate, doing his utmost to heckle the minister. Tanner took the ball, fingered it carefully, stepped back as though to make room for his double hop, then whirled and threw the ball to second base just in time to catch the lunk-head trying to steal a lead.

"Out!" roared Chief David.

Willowdale's nine swarmed around the minister, slapping his back boisterously.

"A pitchin' parson," marvelled Pete Popovitch. "Sonavagun! Now I seen everything!"

Vicksburg began talking loudly as the Willowdale batters lined up for their parade to the plate. Dooley Harper was first man up, and everyone knew that he was the weakest hitter on the home team. But Dooley felt good right then, being keyed up over catching the minister's speed-ball. So Dooley leaned his weight into the first ball that came near and socked it out to mid-field for a two-base hit. Then Al cracked one

fair and square and the ball soared out beyond the last fielder. Dooley and Al romped home to bring the score up to five against the Vicksburg count of seven.

"We're on our way!" yelled Willowdale. "Watch us win this ball game!"

"Yah?"

"Yeah!"

The next three Willowdale batters struck out, then it was the minister's turn to walk to the mound a second time. The first man against him ticked a curve for a foul fly which Dooley was happy to catch. Tanner pitched the second batter to a three-strike out. But the third contestant was something else again. He swung hard and connected with a fast ball; it went straight out to fielder Cressman's glove, who fumbled badly and made a slow recovery. The Vicksburg player galloped around the diamond at top speed to make a home run and thus raised the visitors' lead. The score was eight to five.

"That's okay!" shouted the Willowdale team. "That's just an accident!"

"Play ball!" ordered the policeman referee, and Tanner smoked it down the line into Dooley's mitt.

"Ssssstrike!"

It was one-two-three with this batter, whose stick never came near any of the minister's offerings. Then it was Willowdale's chance at scoring as the game reached the last half of the ninth inning.

"Hold 'em, gang!" roared Vicksburg.

The first man clouted the ball smack into the second baseman's hand and went dejectedly back to the bench.

Jimmy Todd laid out a slow grounder and beat the throw to first, then Pete Popovitch brought him home on a smashing three-bagger. But Pete was tagged out on the final slide, so the crowd groaned and studied the score with gloomy eyes : eight to six for Vicksburg, with two down for Willowdale.

" It's still a ball game," whooped Cap Riley as Cressman banged the leather for a one-bagger. He stole second on a catcher's fumble, then husky Bill Munn lunged into a low ball and raced it to first base.

" You're up next, Parson," ordered Cap, smiling as he clapped Tanner on the back.

" Oh, no ! " protested the minister. " The whole game is at stake now."

" Yep. How're you at batting ? "

" Absolutely rotten," stated the minister, with rueful honesty.

Cap Riley laughed and said : " Don't worry about it. Just try. Win or lose, Mister, we're all for you ! "

Reverend Tanner felt a lump rise in his throat as he walked toward the plate. He had become very fond of Willowdale during his period of service in the town, and he felt exceedingly proud of its good people at that queer moment of game tension. But when he remembered his low batting average during college days, his spirits sank as he grasped the bat.

" Sock it over the fence, Pop ! " yelled Morton.

The first pitch was a teaser, but the minister made a mock pass at it to create a diversion as Bill Munn sprinted to second base. Cressman was now hunched

on third, all ready to pound down the home stretch. While Tanner was checking these matters, the Vicksburg pitcher slapped in a fast throw and the Chief of Police reluctantly but impartially called it fair.

" Strike Two ! "

" Dear me ! " muttered the distressed cleric.

He got himself set while the Vicksburg catcher lopped the ball over to second base in the vain hope of catching Bill Munn with a foot off the bag. Then the pitcher had the ball again and glared at the nervous batter.

" Win it for the new church, Parson ! I'll help ! "

That was the Widow Masters' voice again. She'd help ? Help the fund for a new church ? The minister wondered about this shouted offer just as the ball loomed toward him. It looked steady ; he whirled the bat, putting all his strength into the swing. There was an explosive sound of hard wood striking the leather. Prentice Tanner caught a glimpse of the soaring ball as he ran like a schoolboy to first base, scampered on to second and third, then almost stepped on Bill Munn's heels as they charged over the home plate to the delirious screamings of the Willowdale fans. Score : Willowdale nine, Vicksburg eight.

The minister clambered up into the bleachers, fighting his way past scores of hands that sought to shake his and pound his back and applaud his home run. Tanner scrambled to the top seat in the stand, where Mrs. Masters was still whooping her delight.

" I heard you," panted the minister. " You said—(puff !) You said—win it—for new church—(puff !)

You said—you'd help—(puff!) Will you—make—a donation?"

"I certainly will!" cried the lady. "I've waited a long time to see Vicksburg get its ears knocked off!"

"You gotta join the team, Parson!" shouted the Willowdale players, climbing the bleachers in pursuit of the panting minister.

"Sonavagun!" yelled Pete Popovitch. "Be our pitchin' parson!"

"Oh, no," protested Tanner. "I couldn't."

"Sure you could, Pop!" said Morton, popping up between Dooley Harper's legs. "Golly, Pop— I didn't know you were a killer-diller at the plate!"

"Come on," implored Cap Riley. "If we can beat Vicksburg, we got a chance to win the league pennant."

"Look here, Mr. Tanner," cried the Widow Masters, showing her shrewdest smile. "I'll make a bargain with you. You play ball for Willowdale, and I'll donate half the money to buy lumber and other materials for the new church!"

"New church?" echoed Dooley. "Say, I heard about that! Listen, Parson: the pennant's worth five hundred dollars in cash. Win it for Willowdale, and the team'll give it all to the church fund."

"We'll do better'n that," seconded Cap. "Win, lose, or draw, every man-jack on the team'll help you with a building bee if you join our nine."

"Sonavagun!" cried Pete. "I'll sell plumbin' stuff at cost and install it for free— But you gotta join the team!"

Tanner tried to catch his breath enough to protest, but Cap Riley, Dooley, Bill Munn, Cressman, and the other baseballers grabbed the minister and hoisted him onto their shoulders.

"We're building a new church!" they yelled. "The Pitching Parson has joined the team!"

The fans shouted approval, crowding around to shake hands with the minister and promise help and donations.

"Atta old kidderooo, Pop!" shrilled Morton.

That's how the Willowdale team started the winning streak which earned them the league pennant. And that's why all Willowdale helped build a new church for the Pitching Parson to preach in.

II

The Gold Mine

WHEN the autumn colours were at their brightest, Booker John came across our trout stream with a knapsack on his back and a newly cut saskatoon stave in his hand.

"I'm here to say good-bye, Friend Pete," he told me. "As Kipling wrote, the Red Gods are calling and I have a restless wind in my soul."

"Are you moving away?" I demanded in alarm.

"No, Peter, though I thank you for implying that my presence would be missed." Booker shifted the weight of his small pack, smiling as he chucked the

chin of my youngest child. "I'll be back before the snows of winter wrap their white cloakeries on the forest. For the nonce, I just wish to take a little walk."

"But where're you going?"

"Can't answer, friend, because I have no idea." Booker looked as if he relished the thought. "I feel the tug of the seasonal change, and in lieu of flying southward with the birds to the glamorous lands of the Caribbean, I'll merely stroll around a bit until the restlessness is over. When that happens, I'll be happy to return to my bachelor's shack over yonder and spend the winter discussing politics, poetry, and the merits of rabbit stew with you. Good-bye, Pete."

So he went whistling down the road, and I couldn't help stopping my work to watch him out of sight. There was a pang about seeing him go and a wish that I could have gone with him. Yet he wanted to be alone and, for my part, I am a family man with responsibilities and cannot chase whims like my philosophic friend.

Booker John had helped me stook my barley crop, but all through the harvest season I'd sensed his desire for something new. He wasn't bored, because Booker doesn't get that way. He spends his time loafing, if you want to use an honest word, but he makes of it a busy life. He reads fine books and talks good talk, and he fries up the nicest fillet of trout you'll ever taste. In addition, he can tell you the habits of any bird or animal or insect in our woodlands, all of this nature learned while sitting on a stump or stretched prone on the grass and watching the wild creatures by

the hour. He never works, other than giving me a hand for friendship's sake when I'm hard pressed. A few dollars come regularly to him as rent for some house property he owns in Willowdale town, and this money pays for his flour and sugar and salt and also looks after the taxes on his piney land with the old log cabin on the knoll.

I watched him stroll out of sight, marking how eagerly he stepped along as though some wonderful adventure was awaiting him just around the corner. When he'd gone, I turned back to mending the separator and tried to put the wrong nut onto the right bolt.

For better than a month he stayed away, though I did hear talk of his whereabouts for part of that time. He'd gone down the road a dozen miles and happened onto a threshing gang working at Haskell's place, so he helped pitch bundles all afternoon to pay for his supper and afterwards got the crew to spin yarns and topped their funniest story with one of his own. From there he'd cut across the fields and the next we heard about him he was staying with the country storekeeper at Kevis, where he sat on a salt barrel next the counter and chatted with any customer who cared to pass the time of day. Then he followed Doctor Gray's car to a home where an old man was ailing, an elderly grandfather who had once been a seafarer. Booker John stayed with the oldster for three days, reciting poetry about the sea and listening while the feeble voice recalled some salty adventures. They say that the grandpa died with a smile on his face, and I

couldn't help giving a silent cheer for my kind-hearted friend.

After that we lost track of him, though there was some hint that he'd been seen in an Indian's wagon heading towards the mountains. Our Indians spend the summer wandering from rodeo to fair among the settlement towns until the turn of leaf comes due in September, then they head back to their foothill cabins to get ready for winter trapping. Booker liked Indians. He once told me that their simplicity of character was a refreshing change from the standardized complexities of modern personalities—whatever that means !

In all these reports about him there was no mention of a fair lady. This was heartening. Booker John is an easy mark for a pretty face, and I'm continually worried for fear he allows his romantic heart to lead him to the altar. It would ruin him, because he'd have to work to support a wife. My own lady agrees with me that Booker is better off single, to let him do as his fancy chooses. Hence you'll understand why we were grateful that he wasn't pursuing some fair face and form.

Then, on a grey day in November when a lowering sky promised snow, Booker trudged into view with his shoes in a shambles and his old clothes not even decent.

" Hail to thee, Friend Pete ! " he called, his booming voice full of its old joyousness.

I dropped my work and rushed out, shaking hands

and taking the knapsack from his shoulders. It was solidly heavy, and Booker was glad to be rid of it. My wife and the young ones who weren't off at school came hustling out; we fussed around our friend and led him to the best chair while getting food ready.

"It warms the wayward cockles of my heart to be thus welcomed," said Booker. "I thank you humbly, good friends, for a fitting climax to a lovely holiday."

"Where did you go, and what did you see?" I asked.

He chuckled.

"Friend Peter, all winter long I'll be telling you my adventures in serial instalments. I enjoyed both people and solitudes. I listened to the wise babblings of children and helped them make willow whistles, spending one full day building a kite that flew very badly. Then there was a farmer who lectured me on the lore of feeding pigs—fascinating stuff, too. A housewife was making mustard pickles as I passed a kitchen one day, so I helped her skin the onions for that delectable appetizer. Next I went westward beyond the good roads in the company of a family of Indians. They taught me a chant they sing when the first thunder is heard during the springtime—primitive music, Pete, and most appealing when there is a hand-drum throbbing in the background. The pleasant lady of the group very kindly used a clever needle to mend some of the worst rips in my clothing, which was tattered even then. I left those friends on the banks of Squirrel Creek, where they have winter quarters."

"Squirrel Creek? Say, you got out into the real wilderness!"

"That I did, Peter, and I travelled a-far among the green solitudes of the mountain forests. I went where fancy led me, following deer trails for easy walking. It was marvellous to watch the animals— I saw a dog wolf on a hilltop rallying the family pack. It was magnificent, Peter, despite my sympathy for the moose they were trailing. And I watched a black bear rip old stumps apart to dine on large wood-ants before seeking a winter den. By the way, did you know that lumbermen believe they can save themselves rheumatic pains by eating wood-ants? A strange superstition, yet modern physicians prescribe bee-stings for arthritis and you'll discover that bees and ants belong to the same hymenoptera family. Perhaps that black bear who was gorging on ants was stiff in the joints and was helping himself to a cure, eh?"

We fed him jellied chicken and sponge cake smothered in whipped cream and wild raspberry preserve. Booker John ate with gusto, heaping lavish compliments on my wife's culinary achievements.

"There were many times when I went hungry," he told us as he sipped some tea. "There are no stores out in the remote wilds, hence I had to dine on wilderness groceries. There is nutritional value in a certain moss which was plentiful and I boiled it, salted it, and supped it down. I tried pine cone nuts, but didn't care for their puckery flavour unless it had been subdued with meat—such as the meat of a fat

porcupine who ambled across my path one day when I was famished. There were also fool hens who volunteered their plump selves as fodder for my pot : Spruce Grouse, I believe they are named. Once I even chased a cougar off a freshly killed mule deer and loaded all the venison I could carry into my pack, a supply that lasted me for several good days. On some bushes clung berries, dried and shrivelled but palatable when stewed. My memory of these gastronomic oddities recedes before the delights of your festive board. My dear people, I love you for your vittles as well as for your friendship."

He bowed. Blessed if I didn't feel like bowing back. My wife blushed at his compliments but clucked in amazement over the assortment of strange food he had been eating.

" And now." Booker John rose. " I must cross the creek to my own domicile. I'd be grateful if you'd accompany me, Friend Pete. That knapsack is heavy, and your farmer muscles are conditioned to hard work."

I toted the bag to his shack for him. Once the door was closed behind us and we were alone, Booker John said :

" Peter, I found a gold mine while I was a-wandering."

" A real one ? "

" The genuine article, friend. Oh, I know that geologists tell us that only glacial deposit gold is found on this eastern side of the Rocky Mountains in our district, and glacier gold is so finely pulverized

that it is difficult to accumulate enough to pay dividends for the work of collecting it. Yet there is another theory which gives the spoof to the geologists, a theory wrapped up in a wise old saying that gold is where you find it. Well, I found it, Pete. Give me that knapsack and I'll show you some nuggets."

He undid the straps and pulled out an old, faded blue shirt that had been knotted into a poke-shaped bundle. He placed this heavy thing on the cabin table and untied the bindings to reveal a mess of greenish particles. There was the gleam of tawny gold here and there, where he had used a knife to scrape at the metal. I picked up a few fragments, marvelling at the solid heft of the tiny nuggets.

"You must have a young fortune here," I said.

"Probably a few hundred dollars' worth," Booker nodded, and suddenly patted me on the shoulder in an affectionate way. "I was right about you, Peter—you are not susceptible to gold fever. The sight of the precious metal doesn't make you jibber like a madman and start lusting for wealth."

"Oh, I'm excited enough," I told him. "And I'm very happy about your good fortune, Booker. A gold strike will put you on easy street, but——"

"But what, friend?"

"Oh, well— I was just wondering if you'd move away from here, now that you'll be rich."

Booker said: "My friend, I've been rich for a long time. My wealth is in here," he touched his head. "And here!" He indicated his heart. "But mind you, I'll admit that when I saw this peculiar fissure

among the rocks and found the green gold heavy in the seam, there came a few minutes of strong temptation. I thought about the distant places I could visit, such as the art galleries of London and Paris and Rome, the wonderful music I could hear at great concert halls, and the library treasures of the best universities which would be available to me. I would love to feast my eyes, just once, upon a tropical sunrise and sunset, and I'd like to visit that aged land of India and there talk with a truly holy man of selfless sanctity. These things tempted me, Peter. Then I knotted together a few samples and carefully covered that seam with concealing rocks and gravel and earth. I feel quite sure that no one else will find my gold mine."

"Well, after you register the claim, the mine will be all yours and then it doesn't matter who sees it."

Booker John shook his head.

"Has it ever occurred to you that we live in a beautiful country? I verified that fact during my travels. In almost any part of our district there is loveliness of scene. This fair land is populated by happy people, both white and red-skinned. All this would be quickly changed were I to register that gold find and start making a million or two of money. There would be new roads, a bustling gold camp, possibly even a full-sized town with all the attendant headaches of rushed development and a furious search for other gold seams in every corner of our peaceful foothills and mountains. I like this lovely land as it is now, with the gradual progress of farmer-folk such

as yourself making it better and a few game animals still around for Indians to hunt. Let the years bring the changes slowly, but let's not have the feverish madness of a gold strike to spoil it all. I intend to forget all about that seam of gold, Friend Pete, because I have no wish to mar the solitary grandeur of the wilderness wherein it hides."

" But listen——"

" Forget any practical arguments, my friend, because the incident is closed and I'll not reveal the location of that mine nor visit it again."

He bundled the heavy gold together in the faded shirt and handed it across the table to me, saying :

" If ever you have serious illness in the family, Pete, you are quite welcome to cash this in and use the money as you see fit. But I ask the favour that you never tell a soul where it came from—in fact, you don't know where I got it, hence the secret will be easily kept. Meanwhile, bury this root of all evil in the root-cellar among the turnips, then let's go for a stroll through the birches and hunt us a brace of partridge for supper."

Booker John is still my neighbour, rich and all as he is.

III

Musical Mike

MIKE O'FLYNN saw a pedlar lashing a horse, so he punched the man's nose and then bought the animal from him to save it further abuse. He paid forty dollars for the scrawny gelding, which is a sizeable chunk of cash to a man like Mike. He owns a handful of acres near Miller's Pond on which he pastured his cows, calling his holdings "The Lakeside Dairy." That name is painted in green letters on the sides of the cart that Theresa, Mike's wind-broken race-horse, pulls around Willowdale's streets of an evening. O'Flynn sits proudly on the seat, his blunt fingers tight on the reins while two or three of his round dozen of red-headed children scurry with the milk bottles to the house doors.

Mrs. O'Flynn could have used forty dollars in many other ways, what with the boisterous children so hard on clothes, and she used her tongue on Mike when he led the miserable horse into the yard.

"Wheeest," said O'Flynn. "That pedlar man had a meanness in his eyes, so Oi had to buy this sorry cob to save it being larruped again, darlin' Nora."

Mrs. O'Flynn gave him her special look, a glance that combined exasperation and devoted love.

Then the trouble started, for at that moment Chief of Police Tom David stalked into Mike's yard with a summons because the pedlar man had taken his swollen nose to the law. Mike went down the street with the Chief to the Town Office, above which there is a quiet court-room. Judge Benn listened with controlled impatience to the snivelling complaints of the pedlar and then the jurist reluctantly fined O'Flynn ten dollars and three dollars costs.

"If Oi don't pay," said Mike, ruffling his red hair with a distraught hand. "What's the rest av the sentence?"

"You mean the alternative of penal servitude?" The Judge consulted a law-book, scowled at it, then looked benignly across at O'Flynn. "The alternative will be ten days in jail, which is the least I can give you for assault, Michael."

"Oi'll take it, then. It'll keep me shut away from timptation, Yer Honour, 'cause if ye turned me loose right now Oi'd be after takin' another poke at yon horse-beatin' pedlar."

Mrs. O'Flynn's blue eyes were moist when she came

to visit Mike half an hour later in Willowdale's single jail-cell.

" I've a bit o' money in me stocking," she told him. " We could easy enough pay the fine."

" Oi'll not hear av it, Nora darlin'. Me punch was righteous. The pedlar knows it, Judge Benn knows it, and Chief David too. So as a protest over all this legal palaver, Oi'll serve the time. Wi' the boys to help, you can manage foine at home ? "

" We can manage—but we'll all be lonely for you, dear."

" As for that, Chief David said he'd let you and the spalpeens visit me any time at all, at all."

" He's a kindly man— Ah, let me pay the fine, dear ! "

" No ! Oi'm serving time for the principle av bein' able to smack a man who smacks a defenceless baste ! "

" As you will," sighed Mrs. O'Flynn, who had come prepared for the worst. " Well, here's some tripe and onions for your lunch, along wi' a few potato scones and a sup o' pudding."

Mike beamed.

" The Chief said Oi'd have me meals provided by the Regal Café, but— Och, there's no cook in all the world can compare wi' you, Nora darlin'."

She kissed him, then went weeping homewards and sent the oldest boy back with the new farm magazine that had just arrived. Next she sent three of the other children to neighbours to borrow more reading matter, whereupon the kiddies returned home laden

with slabs of pie and cake and goodies their friends wanted Mike to have as treats to cheer him. Before long other neighbours called around at the O'Flynn home with more delicacies, to show in tangible form their sympathy for O'Flynn. Chief Tom David became used to the constant stream of red-headed children passing his office *en route* to Mike's cell and always bearing gifts for their imprisoned parent.

"Most popular convict I ever had," smiled the Chief, and propped open the door of Mike's cell to make it easier for the young visitors.

Next morning the Chief's tribulations started. The day began auspiciously enough, with Tom David contributing a handful of cigars to Mike's comfort and sitting on the O'Flynn cot to help the prisoner polish off some brook trout, strawberries and cream, and other palatable titbits that friends had prepared for Mike's breakfast. Then Nora arrived with a darning-bag in hand to spend a gossipy hour with her husband, who puffed contentedly on a cigar while listening to her account of home doings. Well-wishers kept dropping in, almost everyone bringing a bag of goodies to soften the hardships of Mike's prison life. O'Flynn couldn't possibly eat all the food. Nora carried some home to the children, and Mike prevailed upon Chief David to take segments of pie and cake upstairs to the Town Clerk, to Cap Riley the Fire Chief, and to Miss Handy the Town Stenographer, all of whom came down to the cell to personally thank O'Flynn and offer any help within their power. Judge Benn also called that morning and brought a

basket of fruit for the prisoner. But it was Dooley Harper, the grocery man, who fetched the present that started the bedevilment of Chief David. Dooley presented Mike with a mouth-organ.

O'Flynn was delighted. He lay on his cot and played harmonica solos in a most inexpert way. The Chief of Police, owner of the finest library of symphony records in town, hunched his ears against the O'Flynn discords and hurriedly left to make a morning tour of the town. When he finally returned, three of Mike's children were there. O'Flynn had lined up his offspring and was playing a loud accompaniment to their singing rendition of "Danny Boy." The performance was anything but tuneful, since Mike kept wandering three or four notes off-key and his loyal children, loathe to discredit their father, tried to keep their voices in tune with Mike's wanderings.

"Wowwwwwww!" moaned the pudgy Chief. It was near the end of the month, which meant that the policeman had reports to make out and he could not stay away from his office. The suffering officer was almost grateful when an emergency called him out to stop a truckers' fist-fight in front of Hagen's Furniture Store.

Mike hailed the policeman into the cell when he returned to the building, because O'Flynn had received two complete chicken dinners, three pies, and four iced cakes, plus assorted boxes of cookies and tarts. Chief David could not resist his prisoner's invitation to sit down and join Mike at a cell-side feast.

"Me dungeon is gettin' all fouled up wi' good food,"

Mike noted after the repast. " Please take some av these things to your desk, Chief, to leave me room for relaxin'."

The Chief did as directed. All afternoon, as he laboured on reports and cringed his ears over Mike's mouth-organ solos, the rotund policeman kept nibbling on the rich fare so near at hand. The result was that he had absolutely no appetite for supper that evening, whereupon his wife insisted on giving him some medicine.

" It's been a hard day," sighed the Chief. " Mike's music, and now— Castor Oil ! "

Pete Popovitch the plumber called to pay his respects on the morning of Mike's third day in jail. Pete had once made a gigantic whistle by using a long length of waterpipe and boring spaced holes in it, then plugging the top end with lead after installing a suitable mouth-piece. The plumber brought along this out-sized flute to lend to Mike and help him pass away the time.

Mike applied himself to the giant whistle with the same enthusiasm he had lavished on the mouth-organ. The plumber's creation produced a tremendous noise, a shrilling sort of pressurized scream that hurt the ears of everyone who happened to be within two blocks of Mike's cell. Miss Handy, the Town Stenographer, who worked directly above O'Flynn's prison, began complaining of a fierce headache. The Town Clerk had to go out of town, nor was he sorry when leaving-time came. Cap Riley the Fire Chief, an avid fan of the detective story, found that he could not concentrate

upon fictitious murders but began to think murderous thoughts involving an unmusical Irishman. Mike himself was supremely happy, exploring every cacophonous eddy in the River Shannon tune.

" Enough is enough ! " cried Chief David, who had started his day by listening to Mozart's melodious " Nachtmusik." The paunchy officer waddled quickly over to Judge Benn's house and offered to pay Mike's fine to the surprised magistrate.

" I can't accept it," the Judge declared. " Mike is serving time because of a principle of honour, as you know. We can't interfere with his decision."

" You've no idea how it's interfering with my work," grumbled Tom David.

Judge Benn returned with the Chief to the Town Building, the jurist carrying a checker board under his arm and having excellent intentions about silencing Mike's music by playing him a studious game or two. But during the policeman's absence some of Mike's children had come to visit and O'Flynn had hatched an idea. He sent them home to bring back an ancient auto-harp and vocal reinforcements. When Chief David and the Judge arrived, one lad was playing the mouth-organ, one was strumming the strings of the harp, while four small O'Flynns were singing under the guiding scream of the Popovitch Waterpipe Whistle as Mike led them through the difficult musical maze of the " Rose of Tralee." Judge Benn forgot all about checker games as he stood marvelling at the cell door.

" It's for Nora," Mike explained when the final

shriek of Tralee had echoed to silence. "When she brings me lunch, we'll sirinade her."

"That'll be very nice," murmured the Judge, whereupon the harmonica, auto-harp, O'Flynn voices, and the plumber's pipe started all over again. Chief David scowled reproachfully at the magistrate, while Miss Handy, upstairs, covered her typewriter in a hurry and went home on sick leave.

The Chief shared Mike's lunch, which was a steaming steak and kidney pie followed by Mrs. Benny Roche's pineapple whip as dessert. Chief David had two helpings of everything and sighed with gastronomic pleasure, but his peace of mind was spoiled by Al the garageman. He came with a battered accordion in his hands.

"I heard you tootlin' the Popovitch Whistle," Al explained, passing over the accordion. "You'll find this a lot easier, Mike."

"Och, thanks!" beamed the pleased prisoner. "Oi've never played wan o' them things before, but now's me chance to learn."

"That's right," agreed Al, going quickly off to work as the first wheezy notes sounded.

All twelve of the O'Flynn children came that afternoon. Mike gave the eldest lad the Popovitch Whistle to play and rotated the mouth-organ and auto-harp impartially among the others. Those without instruments sang a note behind Mike's asthmatic accordion and off-key baritone. They pursued "The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls," but never quite caught up with the haunting melody.

" Whoooosh ! " groaned Chief David. He went morosely down to Roche's Drug Store and had a double bicarbonate of soda. Then he returned to his office and absent-mindedly ate half a dozen of Mrs. Vic O'Brien's lemon-cheese tarts while trying to ignore the O'Flynn rendition of " The Wearing of the Green."

On the fourth morning of Mike's jail-term, O'Flynn slept late and the Chief worked in peace. But the policeman was not his usual brisk self as he half-heartedly munched on Mrs. Farlow's date and nut chews and jotted down the departmental figures for the month. His meditations were interrupted by Corby, the odd-job man. Corby was carrying a five-gallon gasoline tin which he had converted into a bull-fiddle, and he was heading towards Mike's cell.

" Come back here ! " bellowed the Chief.

His yell wakened Mike, who sighted Corby's fiddle-can.

" It's exactly what the O'Flynn orchestry needs," cried the pleased prisoner.

Mike seized the bow and sawed vigorously on the yowling catgut. On the floor above, the Town Clerk wished he hadn't been in such a rush to get back to Willowdale, while Miss Handy massaged her temples nervously. When Nora O'Flynn paid her morning visit to her husband, Mike had anything but mastered a sort of sliding technique on the can-fiddle. He greeted her fondly.

" Och, darlin' ! Oi'm learnin' again all the foine

tunes Oi courted ye with. Sing along wi' me as Oi play ' Kitty av Coleraine ' on wan string ! "

Tom David hurried out to the street, where he chanced to meet Doctor Gray.

" You look poorly," pronounced the medico, and led the policeman into his office to make a physical check. " Yes, it's obvious that you'll have to go on a diet, Chief. We'll try milk and orange juice at three-hour intervals, and not another thing for two weeks."

" Okay," muttered the policeman, smothering a belch caused by Mrs. Soapy Smith's green tomato pickles which Mike had insisted on him sampling. " How about a heartburn pill right now, Doc ? "

When the Chief returned to his office, he found that Mike had somehow acquired a Sweet Potato Whistle. Unhappily, it was pitched in a very different key from that possessed by the Popovitch Whistle. The assembled O'Flynns were attacking " Danny Boy " once more, Mike sawing on the fiddle-can while the children played whistles, accordion, auto-harp, and provided some lusty vocals. Mike's own baritone soared around the outer edges of the melody, untrue but loud. The Chief went hurriedly upstairs. There he found Cap Riley, who had stopped reading a book entitled *The Strangler's Rope* and was toying thoughtfully with a fireman's axe while listening to the O'Flynn bedlam. The worried Town Clerk and the suffering Miss Handy joined the conference.

" Can't Judge Benn think of something ? " asked the Clerk. " How about letting Mike off early for good behaviour ? "

" I'll go see him," the Chief offered, smothering a burp caused by the Boston Cream Pie brought by Carpenter Cressman as his contribution to Mike's happiness. " Oh, drat ! I forgot all about that diet again ! "

Judge Benn was sympathetic.

" What you ask is highly irregular, Chief. And Michael, bless his heart, is enjoying himself. He told me yesterday that this jail session was the finest holiday he'd ever known. However, I'll come back with you and study the law-books ; we may find some sort of legal loophole."

The O'Flynn orchestra was in full swing ; " Mother Machree " was undergoing a state of siege.

" I'll hurry," said Judge Benn, entering the court-room after glancing at the stricken faces of the civic workers. But the legal texts yielded no solution.

" Not a chance," he reported to Tom David as he joined him and the others in the Town Office half an hour later. " Mike will just have to serve his full term."

" Oh, no ! " protested Miss Handy. " I wonder if I could resign for the duration ? "

The Judge cocked an ear at the discordant row coming from the basement cell and asked for identification of the tune.

" They say it's ' When Irish Eyes Are Smiling,' " the policeman answered. " They're planning to play it for Mrs. O'Flynn when she brings his lunch."

" Does she bring all his meals ? "

" Most of them. I'm supposed to buy prisoners' meals at the Regal Café, but so many of Mike's friends have sent goodies that there's been no café food bought at all. That's how I caught this bout of indigestion, because I've been helping Mike sample the town's best cooking."

" It's our loophole ! " cried the Judge. " If Michael isn't eating jail food, we obviously owe him money for the meals his wife and friends supply in place of the official fare. A pencil, please, Miss Handy. Now, then, Chief—how many meals has he eaten ? "

" Oh, boy ! " gloated the policeman.

" Hey ! " said Cap Riley. " The music's stopped."

" Music, he calls it ! " snorted Tom David.

One of the O'Flynn children came pounding into the room.

" It's Bridgett ! " cried the boy. " She's sick ! "

" Which one is Bridgett ? " asked the Chief, trotting his fastest down the stairs.

" The black and white one," answered the boy.

" Huh ? "

By this time they were in the basement, where Mike was teetering at the doorway of his cell and yelling :

" Oi'll pay me foine, Chief. It's Bridgett, me favourite cow."

" She's expectin'," explained Mrs. O'Flynn, blushing like a schoolgirl. " Mike's the only one who can ease her along."

" Nora darlin', get the money out av your stockin'."

" 'Tis all ready in me hand."

She thrust the ten dollars fine plus three dollars costs towards Judge Benn, whereupon Mike bolted from the open cell.

" Wait ! " ordered the Judge. " You've served four days, Michael, and the Chief tells me that you haven't eaten any of the prison food. Therefore you've got a rebate due you on time served and meals saved. Let me see, now— I estimate you owe the court three dollars and seventy-five cents, Michael, so here is your change."

" I'll take it." Mrs. O'Flynn spoke quickly. " And many thanks."

" You're very welcome," bowed Judge Benn.

" A real pleasure," seconded Chief David, beaming as he watched Mike O'Flynn bound up the stairs followed by his red-headed children and the comely Nora. " And now—" The policeman's smile became fiendishly triumphant. " Now I'm going to lock up Corby's fiddle-can and the Popovitch Whistle, for life ! "

IV

Hammy and the Birds and Bea

THAT well-known Willowdale naturalist, Farnham J. Brown, was taking an after-breakfast stroll in the garden one June morning when the swallows arrived.

"Look, Hammy," said his wife, who knew nothing about natural history but who dutifully pretended an interest. "See all the little birds!"

"Swallows, Beatrice. To be exact, the *albifrons* of the *Petrochelidon* genus, commonly called Cliff or Eave Swallows."

"Yes, dear," murmured the lady.

"A most interesting bird," continued Farnham, clearing his throat in a certain way. The way he cleared it, for example, when he was the guest speaker at a Rotary Club luncheon or at a Home and School

meeting or some other gathering. " The Cliff Swallow is noted for——"

" Oh, goodness ! " exclaimed Beatrice. " I just remembered ! The Women's Club is meeting here this afternoon, so I'll have to bake and clean house. See you at lunch-time, Hammy."

" Ahhhhhh——" Farnham expelled his oratorical breath with some regret. He ambled along the path that led to the converted barn which housed his office. Before entering, the naturalist glanced back and noticed that the swallows were flying above the house and nodded his head in satisfaction. Then he started his day's work, which was preparing a treatise for the government on *Citellus richardsonii*, the common ground squirrel or " gopher " of the west.

The essay was shaping up well and had reached a (*d*) subsection under the heading of " Ground Squirrels, Dens of," when a buzzer sounded and he glanced at the mechanical device in surprise.

" Lunch-time already ? " He consulted his watch to verify this. Farnham left his office, pleasantly aware of having done a good deal of work that morning. He paused to admire the lilac bloom, then continued on towards the house and noted in passing that the Yellow Warblers, a Purple Finch, assorted Robins, and the obnoxious English or House Sparrows were all whistling or chirping their various spring songs.

" Hello, Hammy," greeted his wife, busily dishing the meat.

" Ah, Beatrice ! Smells delicious, dear. Lamb stew, isn't it ? "

He took his place at the table, first switching on the radio. Bea set the serving-plates before him; he spooned out meat and vegetables while listening to the news announcer tell about troublesome matters throughout the world.

"Too bad; too bad!" muttered Farnham, summarizing the news.

"Listen, Hammy," Bea said, picking up her napkin. "Those swallows we saw this morning—d'you know what they're doing?"

"Eh? Oh, the *albifrons*. What are they doing, dear?"

"Building nests!" she announced triumphantly.

He masticated a mouthful of food, swallowed, then cleared his throat.

"Well, Beatrice, when one considers that the birds fly all the way from their South American winter-quarters across the considerable land and water areas of the Central Americas, Mexico, and the United States for the sole purpose of getting back here to Alberta to propagate their species, one is not too surprised to learn——"

"Yes, but Hammy; they're building on our house."

"Eh?"

"Yes, they are," she insisted. "They're clustering around under the eaves. You know how the bricks are set fancy there, kind of corner-wise? Well, that's where the birds are making their nests."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Farnham, forking up another portion of lamb. "Cliff Swallows, or Eave Swallows if you prefer that name, are marvellous

controllers of insects. If they establish their nests under our house-eaves, we can be sure that they'll pay us a goodly rent by preying on pests all around our home region. Ahhhh—did you happen to notice how many birds are in the colony ? "

" Oh, hundreds and hundreds ! "

Mr. Brown smiled in a superior way.

" The untrained observer is always apt to exaggerate bird numbers," he murmured, as if to himself. " Probably there would be around fifty birds in all."

" Yes, dear," sighed his wife. " Have some more greens ? "

" Thank you. And how are preparations for the ladies' meeting ? "

" I'm all ready for the crowd, Hammy. I've got my baking done, and I've cleaned and dusted everywhere. In any case, it's so pleasant to-day that we'll likely sit out on the lawn most of the time. Would you care to join us when we have tea ? You know how the ladies are about your work ; some will want to ask questions about bluebirds or something."

Farnham considered this while serving dessert.

" Very well, dear. I'll be glad to answer their questions."

" Then you'd best put on another tie, Hammy. Why don't you burn that horrible thing you're wearing now ? "

" This happens to be my favourite tie," he reproved her, and rose. " A very tasy dinner, Beatrice. Now I must get back to the treatise."

" Good-bye until tea-time, then."

Mr. Brown strolled into the garden and took time to check on the swallow situation. Already some members of the seventy-bird flock were carrying mud-pellets to the eaves and had started building their nests.

" The swallow family is a diversified group," observed Farnham. " Largest member is the Purple Martin, our only colony box-nester of worth. Then there is the dainty Tree Swallow, so beloved of all. Next we have the beauteous and fork-tailed Barn Swallow, who is a handsome contrast to the drably coloured little Bank Swallow. Sometimes we see a few Violet-Green Swallows which stray into our district from the western side of the mountains, while I'm nearly convinced that the Rough-Wings of the East do come this far west at times. Finally, completing the family group represented in our district is this bird we have here, the Cliff Swallow."

He nodded benignly at the fluttering birds, then murmured something about having a date with *Citellus* as he went towards his office.

At tea-time a splatter appeared on the president's hat. Mrs. Roche shrilled an agonized cry, removing her floral bonnet at once. The ladies glanced upwards and were alarmed when they saw the numbers of swallows flying above them. Hastily the group moved from the lawn to the verandah.

" Them's barn swallows," said Mrs. Soapy Smith. " They bring bed-bugs."

" No, no, no ! " differed Farnham Brown, smiling

as he shook a reproving finger in her direction. "They're Cliff or Eave Swallows, and they do *not* attract bed-bugs."

"We had 'em on our barn at the farm. I saw the bed-bugs myself, with my own eyes."

"What you saw, my dear Mrs. Smith, were creatures that may have resembled the bed-bug in appearance, but there the similarity ends. The swallow parasite is definitely *not* a bed-bug."

"Well," Mrs. Smith sounded exasperated. "To me, bugs is bugs!"

Beatrice nervously suggested, in the silence that followed, that the ladies might like to ask her husband a few questions about natural history. There was another long silence, then the elderly Miss Holmes put down her tea-cup and told Mr. Brown that her tabby cat had, that very morning, come into her kitchen carrying a dead bird. Miss Holmes thought that the bird was somewhere between a wren and a robin in size and was kind of grey-brown in colour, where it had not been eaten.

"Indeed!" commented Farnham, as politely as possible.

Mrs. Smith whispered some detrimental opinions regarding swallows into the receptive ears of Mrs. Roche, who was still daubing tragically at her hat. It was not an auspicious time for an informal lecture on natural history, hence Farnham excused himself and returned to the barn.

When his wife buzzed him at supper-time the naturalist was in a nicely relaxed frame of mind and

was well satisfied with his day. He described the highlights of the *Citellus* treatise to his wife.

"That's nice," Bea said as she set the salad in front of him. "Hammy, there's something I wanted to ask you. Is there any way of getting rid of those swallows?"

"Why, Beatrice! Swallows are beneficial birds, useful allies in our continual fight against the insect pests. I'm delighted that they have elected to nest on our house."

"Well, I'm not," declared his lady. "I've been upstairs, and I see that our bedroom windows are all splotched."

"Oh, that's nothing. After all, windows can be cleaned."

"Yes, but *I* do the cleaning! And poor Mrs. Roche's hat is completely ruined. To-day was the first time she'd worn it, too. Another thing, Mrs. Soapy Smith was telling us more about swallows after you left; she's positive that they bring bed-bugs."

"She's absolutely wrong. I can show you the reports of half a dozen ornithologists and entomologists who worked together to catalogue bird parasites, and the creature we find around Cliff Swallow nests is definitely not the same as the bed-bug infesting human habitations. In fact, it has been proved by science——"

"Pish with science!" said Bea, with unexpected spirit. "Hammy, I just don't want those swallows nesting on our house."

"But I assure you there's not the slightest danger of them bringing bed-bugs——"

"Never mind the bed-bugs, then. What bothers

me is that a person can't walk around the garden any more. Why, this afternoon two of the ladies got their dresses spotted while gathering some iris flowers."

" Oh, well ; a minor nuisance, really."

" Is it ? I'll have you know, Hammy, that Mrs. Roche paid fourteen dollars and ninety-five cents for that hat only last Saturday, while Mrs. Dobbs and Milly David will both need to send their party dresses to the cleaners. No, Hammy ; I've made up my mind. Those birds will have to leave ! "

Farnham launched into an excellent lecture about swallows. He mentioned that each Purple Martin devoured 25,000 mosquitoes during the birds' summer stay in nesting territory in Canada, while every Tree Swallow accounted for over 10,000 mosquitoes. He arrived at these figures, which he considered to be conservative, by calculating the minimum flight mileage travelled by the birds during the summer season and then allowing them a catch of one mosquito per flight mile. Warming to his theme, he was about to deal with the true Barn Swallows and the hole-burrowing Bank Swallows as a prelude before praising the Cliff Swallows. But Beatrice did not hear him out. She went to the book-case and selected a bird-book—not Farnham J. Brown's own text, but a book written by a more prominent naturalist.

She silently read about the habits of Cliff Swallows, pausing and re-reading the significant words that such swallows, when nesting on the steep cliff walls rising above rivers or lakes, always chose a nest location well sheltered from rainfall. This was most important, the

writer explained, because Cliff Swallow nests are built of clay pellets which are soluble when exposed to moisture.

Mrs. Brown closed the book and went outside, leaving Farnham to pour his own tea and cut himself a slice of cake.

" Women get so excited about these little matters," muttered the naturalist. " That Mrs. Smith and her bed-bugs——! As for Mrs. Roche's hat, the bird who splattered it was doubtless expressing an understandable opinion of the lady's taste in millinery."

He raised his head, listening. Something was beating against the house walls. Farnham went to the windows and peered out.

" Beatrice ! "

But he was too late. She had already sprayed the swallows' nests with water from the garden hose, to the intense excitement of the birds.

" That's cruel ! "

" It is not," she protested. " The birds have barely started building, and none of them have laid any eggs as yet. They've got lots of time to go build elsewhere, and I'm merely serving notice that they can't settle here on our house."

The naturalist reached for the hose, but Bea made a threatening gesture with the nozzle. Hammy retreated hastily onto the verandah, where he continued his lecture on the usefulness of swallows in general and Cliff Swallows in particular.

" That's very interesting, dear," his wife conceded. " But they can go do their good deeds elsewhere."

The man stalked out to his office and sulked there until bedtime.

"If anyone should hear about what you've done," Farnham told her as they climbed the stairs together, "my professional reputation might be seriously damaged. I'm a naturalist, and my life is dedicated to the protection and conservation of our wild-life heritage. If people find out that my own wife turned a hose on those beneficial swallows' nests and heartlessly drove them away from my home——"

"You could tell anyone who squawks about Mrs. Roche's hat and the dry-cleaner's bill we'll have to pay for those two dresses they soiled. We'll just have to pay the ladies, Hammy; it's the only decent thing to do, under the circumstances."

Farnham groaned.

They settled down to sleep. At dawn, their slumbers were interrupted by the twitterings of swallows who were busy rebuilding under the eaves. Farnham J. Brown smiled and rolled over to continue his rest. But Bea got up at once, muttering angrily.

When Hammy came down to breakfast he had to eat cold cereal, which he loathed, and plain bread, which he considered an improper substitute for toast. Mr. Brown thought that the make-shift repast was hardly sufficient to fortify a man for a morning's session with *Citellus richardsonii*.

"I've been busy," explained Bea, drying her hands.

"Using the hose again, no doubt?"

"Yes."

"Beatrice, I must say that I had no idea you

harboured such a vicious streak in your otherwise lovely character."

"Foo," said his wife. "I'm not doing the swallows any permanent harm. And did you happen to notice the white-washed condition of our upstairs windows this morning?"

"I've got more important things to think about," retorted Farnham, with dignity.

In silence they went out into the garden for their morning stroll. Bea carried a raised umbrella, though there were no rain clouds in sight and the sun was not too warm at that early hour. Overhead the swallows darted and swooped, occasionally coming to rest on the eave brickwork to deposit beakfuls of clay construction material.

"You'll have to excuse me, Hammy. I've got to go get busy with that hose again."

Mr. Brown strode to his office and slammed the door behind his outraged back.

For two days Bea Brown fought a moist battle with the Cliff Swallows and grimly sprayed the house eaves at half-hour intervals. The birds were persistent, carrying their pellets of clay to the walls farthest from her watery attacks. But the lady was equally stubborn and gradually circled the house with the prying jet to wash away the birds' nests every time they took form. She neglected cookery, housework, and Hammy's comfort, but she did not spare the swallows. And on the third morning, the birds were not twittering outside the bedroom windows as usual.

Beatrice had hot oatmeal and crisp toast ready for Farnham when he came down to breakfast.

" Ahhhhh ! " he beamed. " This is more like it, my dear."

" Yes, Hammy."

" And, Beatrice— I've been thinking. We'll just forget this whole sorry business, eh ? You've succeeded in driving the poor swallows away, and no doubt you are now satisfied with your victory ? "

" Yes, dear."

" Then we'll say no more about the matter," stated Farnham J. Brown. " Only, regarding Mrs. Roche's hat—can you guarantee that she'll buy a more suitable model with our money ? "

When they went outside for their after-breakfast stroll, Bea carried her old umbrella. Farnham J. was about to comment on its presence when his trained ear caught the twittering of Cliff Swallows. He stared skywards, smiling as he prepared to joke about the birds' perseverence.

" Ah-hahhhhh ! So they have moved to the eaves of my barn-office, eh ? "

" Yes, dear," murmured the amused Mrs. Brown. " The whole flock of them, too. Would you like me to fetch the hose ? "

The naturalist glanced at her reprovingly.

" That will not be necessary, Beatrice."

" All right, Hammy. We'll say no more about the hose, eh ? "

" Not another word."

" As you wish, Hammy, but this is as close as I

care to go. I'll say good-bye until dinner-time, dear."

"Good-bye."

She watched him go down the garden path towards his office. He proceeded with a jaunty step that somehow implied a happy love of all of nature's wonderful works. Then he came to a startled stop and whipped out a handkerchief to swab vigorously at his bald pate.

"Poor Hammy," murmured Bea, in fond commiseration.

Farnham sprinted the final yards to his office.

"One must remember their good points," he muttered, gingerly dropping his soiled hankie into a wastepaper basket. "One must strive to remember that such birds are decidedly beneficial."

But he was not smiling, this time, as he turned towards his desk to deal with that fascinating rodent, *Citellus richardsonii*.

V

Gally West

"HEY, Chief!" yelled a frantic voice. "How did I get hold of this baby?"

It was Gally West who hailed Chief of Police Tom David with the agonized query. Almost every small town has a perennial drunk as a citizen, but Willowdale's specimen was a choice member of the tippling tribe. Our Mr. West was always a gentleman, and he was always sober on Wednesday nights and on Sundays. He attended both morning and evening services on the Sabbath and his pinkly scrubbed countenance looked cheerfully unpenitent when his good friend, the

Reverend Tanner, spoke enticingly about moderation. On Wednesday evenings Gally always visited Mary Morris, the piano teacher ; they shared a middle-aged passion for Chopin's music and Gally stayed sober on the nights when he called on the dainty spinster. During the rest of the week no one could depend on Gally's sobriety after work hours.

Tuesday night of the 16th was no exception to the rule. At 8 p.m. Gally took up a dignified position outside the Bijou Theatre and made himself needlessly helpful to the patrons, bowing to every one who approached the door and sweeping wide the portal with a gracious hand while he volunteered a number of varied but interesting opinions regarding the weather. Joe Parks, the theatre-owner, hesitated quite a while before he awkwardly suggested that Gally might like to go elsewhere, and he was considerably relieved when Mr. West courteously agreed to do so. At nine o'clock Gally was observed leaning against the town's drinking-fountain, dabbling a finger in the bubbling water and singing " Sailor Beware." The 10 p.m. curfew bell was ringing as a number of ladies were homeward bound from a Home and School meeting, and at that moment Gally was in front of the fire hall pitching imaginary horseshoes at an unseen peg. He paused long enough to raise his hat in polite greeting and jubilantly assured the ladies that he was winning. But at eleven o'clock, when Chief Tom David was making a final round through the business section, Gally West was cold sober as he hurried along main street with a blanket-wrapped baby held gingerly in his arms.

" Where did I get it ? " asked Gally.

Nearby was his book and stationery store, where he had bachelor quarters at the back. It seemed the logical place to take the infant, and the light woke the child. The men beheld two large brown eyes set in the midst of a chubby baby face. Everything looked normal enough as children go, until they spotted the slip of paper pinned to its clothing.

" Ah ! " scowled the Chief. " So it's that sort of business ! "

He examined the pencilled note, which read : " His name is Jimmy. Please be good to him. He's all yours from now on."

" ' All yours,' " repeated Gally. " Say, does that mean me ? "

" It's supposed to," growled the plump Chief, turning the paper over and frowning at the blank side. " Maybe when you're sober you'll remember how you came by this."

" I *am* sober," Gally declared. " But I remember nothing at all."

Tom David nudged the note in an angry way and raised his voice : " I hate this messy kind of stuff ! "

He spoke so loudly that the child took fright and started to cry. The Chief realized his error and sought to make amends by wagging a finger and saying " Kitchee, Kitchee," but the baby continued to howl.

Gally rocked it soothingly and murmured :

" Don't you fret, Jimmy-boy ; you're among friends."

It was sheer chance that the baby stopped crying, looked up into the man's face, and smiled. That smile clinched matters. It was all settled so far as Gally West was concerned, and the man's face took on a marvelling wonder as he smiled back.

Chief David was not aware of this development. He'd gone back to a frowning contemplation of the simple note, rasping his stubby fingers on the fringe of his balding dome while he pondered the official procedure in such matters.

"I suppose I could take it home to my wife for the night," he rumbled uncertainly. "But then again—We never had a baby and she wouldn't know what to do. Maybe I'd best leave it with some younger woman who's experienced, then I'll go find the mother and bring her to time."

Gally said: "Jimmy's mine."

"Huh?"

"Well, the note says he is," Gally contended. "Besides, I've got a notion that you won't find the mother. There's something final about that letter, so I'll look after Jimmy-boy from now on."

That was the beginning of the fight. Of course, Willowdale's great battle between the Certain Element and Gally West did not get properly started right away. At the moment of Gally's declaration, the child in question broke the ensuing silence by producing an uncouth noise. Gally hastily deposited the infant on the table and turned stricken eyes on the policeman.

"You just said he was all yours," grinned Tom David. "Go ahead and do your duty, and welcome!"

"What'll I use?" Then Gally had a sudden inspiration. "I could rip up a sheet to make him some temporary pants, but I think all the clean ones are used up and the rest are at the laundry."

Chief David lumbered down main street at his fastest trot and roused the sleeping John Lung from bed, then the policeman raced back to Gally's store with the unwrapped laundry flapping in his slip-stream. After Gally had performed the appalling business of making Jimmy-boy comfortable again, a discreet knock sounded on the door and there stood John Lung.

"Wanna see Gally's new baby."

At that moment Jimmy-boy claimed attention by crying. It wasn't a frightened cry this time; it was a steady, distressful plaint that no amount of rock-a-bye procedure could hush. In the midst of the commotion John slipped quietly out the door and shortly returned with Wong Lo, night cook at the nearby Regal Café.

"Baby hungly," Wong stated with some authority. "I fix milk like mammas do in my kitchen. Li'l milk, li'l water, li'l syrup, all warm up so's not make baby sick."

Chief David suggested an eye-dropper as a means of getting the milk into the baby, because he had once raised a batch of orphaned pups that way. Gally found a dropper and they tried out the method, but it was noisily unsuccessful. Then Wong recalled that Benny Roche the Druggist had stopped at the Regal

for a late cup of coffee and was still talking politics with the railwayman, Vic O'Brien. Benny caught something of the urgency of Wong's and John's garbled message about Gally's new and hungry baby, so the druggist returned to his store and found a bottle and a couple of nipples. The group hurried over to Gally's quarters, where the milk was re-heated and loaded into the bottle, the nipple scalded under the druggist's supervision, then Jimmy-boy got the business end of the apparatus poked into his squalling mouth and his cries subsided into a happy gurgle.

" Burping a baby after feeding is always necessary," Benny announced when the bottle was empty. " Let me demonstrate."

" I'll do it," said Vic O'Brien. " You had only three kids, Benny, while I've got seven. Look, Gally ; this is the way it's done."

Jimmy-boy was upended on an overalled shoulder and gently back-patted until he belched himself comfortable, then the baby smiled sleepily and John Lung went scampering down the street to get a clothes basket.

" Make bed," he explained.

After Jimmy-boy was bedded down Vic volunteered the prophecy that the baby would sleep until seven o'clock in the morning, when feeding should be repeated. Gally took note of Wong's milk mixture, drew a weary hand across his pulsing brow, and thanked them all as they withdrew from his store. Then the druggist and the engineer and the two Chinamen escorted Chief David to the nearest street light

and demanded the story about the baby's appearance. Tom told them the scanty details and spoke of Gally's determination to keep the child.

" That's silly," said Benny Roche.

" Well, I like kids myself," Vic declared. " Besides, I think Gally's right about the mother, Chief. You won't likely find her."

" Maybe not, but Gally's notion to keep the babe is just plain silly," declared Benny. " We've got laws in this country, and I'll bet a bundle that a deserted or discarded baby comes under the jurisdiction of some welfare agency."

The two Chinamen looked anxious.

" Gally not keep baby ? " asked Wong.

" It isn't likely that he'll want to keep it, after he comes to his senses," Benny answered.

" Too bad," said John Lung. " Baby nice."

He and Wong padded into the Regal Café together, chattering in soft Cantonese.

Mrs. Roche formally launched the battle against Gally at two o'clock that morning. She had listened to Benny's account of the abandoned baby and became indignantly alarmed at the very idea of a helpless infant being looked after by the town's drunkard. Besides, she claimed it was against nature for a man to know much about babies.

" Yes, dear," agreed her husband.

" Then put your clothes back on," she cried, rising from bed. Benny protested, but Mrs. Roche insisted and they got out the car and drove down to Gally's

store and wakened that headachy man from slumber. The lady announced that she had come to get the baby.

" It's very kind of you to offer your help," whispered Gally, mindful of the sleeping child. " But no thanks, just the same. Jimmy-boy is my responsibility by the rulings of a whimsical fate, and I'll look after him to the best of my ability."

Mrs. Roche got more morally indignant by the second, but Gally was adamant and the druggist and his wife finally went home without the infant. Once at the house, Mrs. Roche announced her intention of phoning all her friends to rally support for the Rescue the Baby from That Man idea. Benny had a hard time convincing her that people do not like to be disturbed at three in the morning, and she reluctantly consented to wait until daybreak.

First thing on Wednesday a delegation of ladies headed by Mrs. Roche called on Mr. West and demanded the baby. Gally said " no." He said it politely, but he absolutely refused to give up Jimmy-boy. The ladies withdrew to consider ways and means.

Meanwhile, Vic O'Brien's wife regarded Gally's intentions as understandable and laudable. She gathered together a batch of baby requirements no longer needed by her own thriving family and set out to call on the new foster-parent. As she passed Mary Morris' place she remembered the piano teacher's musical friendship with Willowdale's inebriate, so Mrs. O'Brien went in and related the baby story. Miss Morris

snatched up a hat and helped Mrs. O'Brien carry the baby things to Gally's store. There they found Wong Lo crooning a Chinese song to a happy infant.

"He's a little beauty!" cried Mary, and Wong surrendered the child to her outstretched arms.

"Looks healthy, too," commented the practical Mrs. O'Brien. "Gally, have you given him a bath?"

"Why, no," he confessed. "I washed his face and—ahhhh—other parts. But I didn't give him a complete bath."

"We'll attend to it," Mary offered. "Can't you remember anything at all about how you found him?"

"Not a thing." Gally's smile was rueful.

"Um!" said an unctuous voice from the doorway. It was Mayor Oliver, elected head of Willowdale. "So here's the little fellow who's causing so much excitement, eh? Kootch! Kootch! Cute little rascal, isn't he? Have I interrupted preparations for the bath? Go right ahead, ladies; I'll modestly retire. Ummm! Gally?"

"Yes, Fred?"

"Gally, my errand is difficult. A number of ladies have put me on the official spot, as it were. Frankly, they don't believe that you are qualified to look after an infant, and they have demanded that the town authorities take charge of the child from now on."

"Well, just read this paper."

Gally handed the mayor the note found pinned to Jimmy-boy's clothing. Mary Morris looked very solemn when it came her turn to see the message; she hugged Jimmy close and kissed him.

"Um," said the mayor. "Tom David told me about this."

"My claim is, Fred, that the mother chose me for this particular job of baby-minding, and I intend to do the right thing by the child."

"You betcha," said Wong.

"Very commendable," agreed Mayor Oliver. "But can a man look after an infant?"

"Sure," said Mrs. O'Brien. "My mother died when I was born and my Dad raised me okay. Gally here is doing all right."

"And he's got help." added Mary Morris. "There are lots of us who'll be glad to give him a hand."

"Me too," nodded Wong Lo.

"Um." Mayor Oliver seemed distressed. "Of course, it might be for only a few hours. The mother will likely show up and take back her child."

"I hardly think so," differed Gally. "The note sounds final."

"Um," said the mayor. "Well, if she doesn't appear, I'm of the opinion that the government's Neglected Children's Department will look after the babe. Meanwhile, Gally, it's really the town's responsibility to make sure that the child is properly cared for."

"I'll do my very best, Fred," smiled Gally. "But I'm warning you that I'm insisting on my rights, and it's my contention that this slip of paper legally appoints me the baby's guardian."

"Um!" muttered Oliver. "Well, you've got ladies looking after him right now, so perhaps I could

tell Mrs. Roche and her friends that the child does not lack for feminine attention. Later on— I'm still confused about all this, Gally, but I'll come back later and we'll discuss the legal aspects more fully."

He was just leaving when Chief David opened the door and entered. There was something about the pudgy Chief's face that silenced the group.

"I found the mother," the policeman said without preamble. "She— Well, she's dead. She left a note saying that her husband got killed in a car accident a month back and she's got no folks to help her out. There's something about giving the baby to a gentleman on the bridge last night, and she hopes he'll be good to Jimmy and raise him right. Gally, I thought you'd like to know that she looks like she was a pretty decent sort of person."

"Thank you, Chief."

Mary Morris, with rare intuition, carried the baby over to Gally. As the man took the child, his expression became wonderfully tender. Mayor Oliver cleared his throat to speak, then changed his mind. He took Tom David by the arm and they went out together. Mrs. O'Brien stared after them in a speculative way, then glanced across at Gally and said :

"Go see Judge Benn, Mister. You need legal advice."

"I need sleep," said Wong Lo. "Goo-bye."

"And baby needs a bath," concluded Mary Morris.

The mother's fate seemed to make Mrs. Roche and the Certain Element all the more insistent that Gally

give up the orphaned babe. By noon Willowdale was divided into two factions : those for and those against Gally West as Jimmy's guardian.

" The man's nothing but a common drunkard," accused the Certain Element.

" Yes, but——" protested his friends.

" Can you deny it ? "

" No, but——"

" A drunkard isn't a fit person to look after a helpless infant."

" He won't be drunk to-day at least," Mary Morris told Mrs. Roche. " This is Wednesday, and Gally always stays sober to hear me play Chopin."

She hurried back to the bookstore and asked what Judge Benn had said.

" Well, he thought I was slightly daft," smiled Gally. " But he thinks I have some legal grounds for my claim, with certain reservations which he'll report on later after consulting his books."

Mary was pensive as she stared down at the sleeping child.

" Gally, I wish you'd promise to stay sober."

The man looked startled. " Why, Mary ! We've never talked about such things— Besides, this is Wednesday, isn't it ? "

" Yes, but what about to-morrow ? "

" Ohhhh ! I see what you mean. Well, there's no need of me touching a bottle, because I'm not lonely any more."

She looked at him searchingly.

" Is it as simple as that ? "

" Ah, loneliness is a terrible companion, Mary. I'll promise you that I won't touch a drop while I have Jimmy-boy to look after. Good heavens, I've got to set the child a good example ! "

They laughed together, but Mary Morris felt a depression of spirit as she walked home.

The Certain Element brought more pressure to bear on Mayor Oliver, forcing him to phone Doctor Gray and ask him to make an examination of Jimmy. The doctor was performing an emergency operation at the time, hence Shauna Venables was sent to look at the babe.

" He's just fine," the nurse reported at the mayor's office. " So is Mr. West. When I got there he was reading a book titled *Mother and Child* ! I gave him a few suggestions about the milk formula and lined up a regular feeding schedule, and Jimmy-boy is happy as a young lark and thriving twice as fast."

" Um ! " Mayor Oliver glanced covertly at Mrs. Roche and some other ladies who were in his office at the moment. " Ahhhhh, thank you very much, Miss Venables."

" Young lady." Mrs. Roche looked and sounded ominous. " I am not questioning your knowledge of book theories regarding the raising of children, but may I ask if you have ever been a mother ? "

Shauna Venables paused for an angry moment, then she flashed a diamond ring and a roguish smile.

" Not yet," she replied. " But I have my hopes ! "

Despite these small setbacks and the fact that Gally

West still retained custody of the child, there could be no doubt about the progress being made by Mrs. Roche's group. The majority of Willowdale's citizens had rallied behind the Certain Element, including many of Gally's good friends. All agreed that it was utterly ridiculous for a middle-aged bachelor, and a drinking man to boot, to be looking after an infant. Regardless of the mother's note, many believed that Gally was being quite foolish in thinking that he could take on such a responsibility. They said that the sooner the baby was placed in the hands of the proper authorities, the better it would be for all concerned. Under this kind of verbal pressure, Mayor Oliver called a special session of the Town Council. Mrs. Roche and others made sure that the aldermen knew how the townsfolk felt about the whole affair.

Chief David was called on to tell what he knew about the matter, and the blunt-spoken policeman ended his tale with these words :

" There's one thing that some of you righteous folk seem to overlook. Which is that Gally West is completely captivated by that child and he won't do anything that'll hurt it. You can depend on that."

An outraged murmur rose from the group of ladies, but the Chief merely gave them a curt nod and stalked out. Mayor Oliver cleared his throat a few times and then called the meeting to order again. The result of the hour-long discussion was that a telegram was dispatched to the Neglected Children's Department to ask that an investigator come to Willowdale and decide on Jimmy-boy's future.

When this was settled, the Reverend Tanner hurried to pay Gally West a visit.

" Gally, I'm going to speak of serious matters."

" Please, Parson— I've always admired your tolerance regarding my well-known thirst. Don't spoil it now."

Tanner laughed, then his eyes became sombre.

" Gally, I have a nasty premonition of trouble, and it worries me. I've heard that you've become very fond of this orphaned babe."

" I love the little tike."

" Well, Gally ; what I want to say is this. When a man's heart gets a terrible wrench, he sometimes does something desperate. Do you understand me ? "

" I think so, friend."

The minister smiled, but it was a sad smile.

" Then come and see me, if it should happen to you."

For answer, Willowdale's drunkard reached under the store counter and lifted into view a pair of expensive-looking bottles.

" Take them with you, Reverend, and rest easy."

The minister shook his head and did not touch the bottles.

" It'll be worse than that, Gally. Think it over, and be sure to come to me if the need arises." He paused at the door to glance at the baby, who was cooing in John Lung's clothes basket. " I feel sure you will need me, Gally, so don't forget."

Gally West was thoughtful during the rest of that busy day. After supper he wrapped Jimmy-boy in a swathing of Mrs. O'Brien's blankets and carried the

baby down the street towards Mary Morris' studio. Chief David waved him down near the main corner.

" Everything quiet, Chief ? "

" Right now it is." The policeman stepped close to smile at the big-eyed infant. " Maybe it's the quiet before the storm, because the investigator is due to arrive to-morrow afternoon."

" Ohhhhh ! Thanks a lot, Chief. I'll go see Judge Benn in the morning."

Mary Morris did not play Chopin that night. She tried Jimmy-boy with a rendition of " Brahms' Lullaby " and the music won his approval ; it also put him to sleep. Then Gally told her about Reverend Tanner's visit and what had been said. Mary's eyes became bright and her voice lost some of its steadiness.

" Heed what he says, Gally. Come here, too."

" You sense trouble, then ? "

" Well, it's only that I'd like to help."

Gally pantomimed the act of smashing a bottle on the floor.

" Why don't people believe in miracles any more ? " he asked.

Mary laughed with him, but for the rest of the evening her eyes stayed moist with unshed tears.

In the morning Wong Lo and John Lung minded the baby while Gally went to see the Judge.

" Legally, you do have a slight claim on the child," Judge Benn reported. " The note on the child and the letter left by the mother both help to establish a custody claim of sorts."

" That's fine," smiled Gally.

But the Judge shook his head.

" Morally, you haven't a healthy leg to stand on. To be quite honest about it, I could make but one decision if the case came before me in Court, and I'm afraid that decision would be against you. There are three sound reasons why you'd be refused the right to keep the child."

" Three ? " Gally looked puzzled. " I've thought that there was only one."

" Three," repeated the Judge. " First, you are a man and a bachelor, and hence cannot be considered as naturally fitted to look after so young a child. Second, you haven't a proper home. Two housekeeping rooms behind a store are not the sort of home surroundings suited to the serious business of rearing a child. And thirdly, you are the town's drunkard."

" Ah, yes ! That's the chief stumbling-block."

" Possibly, but the other two reasons are also quite important. Frankly, I'd advise you to dismiss any idea of going to Court on this case. I'm positive you would lose the child, and in addition, you would also lose the respect of your fellow townsfolk for being on the wrong side of the controversy. The more I study the issues at stake, the more hopeless your chances look. I am convinced that the investigator from the Neglected Children's Department will peremptorily take the child away from you, by force if necessary, and there is little hope of you ever getting the baby back. Sorry, Gally, but you've asked for a legal opinion on the whole matter, and this is it."

Gally West went slowly from the Judge's office and down the street to his store. Chief David had joined the Chinamen there and the three did not need to ask about Gally's Court chances. The man took Jimmy-boy into his arms and hugged the little bundle tenderly close.

"Now I know what Reverend Tanner meant," Gally whispered. "And Mary, too—she knew it all along!"

The policeman touched him on the shoulder.

"Sorry, friend. I've been on your side, even though it was crazily hopeless from the first."

"Me too," said Wong Lo, almost sobbing.

"We go now," John Lung muttered. "Leave Gally and baby alone."

The three men started to file out the door.

"Wait!" called Gally.

He bundled Jimmy-boy in his blankets and led the solemn procession down the street. They first stopped at Mary Morris' studio, then they picked up Mrs. Vic O'Brien and quickly moved on to Prentice Tanner's home. There the minister and his wife joined the little parade as they swung back into the business section once more.

That afternoon, when the Special Investigator from the Neglected Children's Department stepped off the train he was annoyed that no town official had come to the station to meet him. He walked down the street and saw a crowd of cheering people blocking Willowdale's main thoroughfare opposite Gally West's

store. Recognizing the name, the investigator pushed through the crowd. He was just in time to hear Mayor Oliver make a presentation speech, giving Gally a beautiful baby carriage as a gift from the Town Council. Mrs. Benny Roche, smiling like a winner, stood beside a blue crib and fingered an impromptu address of four pages she had hastily prepared for the occasion. Almost everyone was holding a parcel or a baby toy of some sort, and everyone was smilingly happy.

Gally was holding Jimmy-boy and looked the happiest of all as he whispered :

" My dear, I wouldn't have dared to hope for myself, but did you really say what you said ? "

" Yes, darling," whispered Mary in return. " I love you ! "

Then the investigator saw what the Willowdale people were really cheering ; there were three papers proudly displayed in Gally West's store window. One was a Marriage Licence. The second was a deed to a house, with a receipted furniture bill attached. And the third paper was an old-fashioned, gilt-edged Temperance Pledge.

Gally had signed it.

VI

That Kind of Man

THE clerk tipped us a wink and we stared at the shrivelled little man standing beside a large young lady at the hotel desk. After they followed the bell-boy upstairs, we flocked over to study the register.

" 'Clem Henderson and daughter Janis, Grassy Flats,' " was scrawled on the pad.

" That's him," nodded Frew. " He looks sharp, too."

" Sure does," we grinned. " Tony will have trouble, this time."

The clerk said he had told Mr. Henderson that Tony Warrso would be in town later on to meet him.

Frew nodded.

"We better go get Tony ourselves, just to make sure that the whole deal is on the level."

Tony Warrso is something of a character around Willowdale. He never worked for a living; all he did was catch coyotes. If you know anything about those tawny wolves, you'll know that Big Tony had to be pretty clever to make a living that way. Which he readily admitted, too.

"The fox is a smart animal, but coyotes make foxes look like dunces. Me, *I* catch coyotes!"

Tony lived in an unpainted shack out on a half-section of scrub land that he never bothered to farm. Why should he plough and plant, when coyote skins were selling for fifteen dollars each and all the wild prairies harboured the yappy creatures?

A hefty giant of a man, this Tony; you could spot him a mile away. He always wore a red mackinaw shirt, a ski cap jaunty on his curly black hair, with blue jeans tucked into cruiser boots. He drove a panel truck, the back end fitted up as a double-decker cage with trap-door drops which were opened by a lever operated from the driver's seat. Five or six lean hounds rode in the cages during coyote season, while Tony drove all over the flats of the range country east of town.

"Lots of coyotes, lots o' money!" laughed Tony, slapping his pockets.

He was always glad to tell how he had outsmarted another coyote or how he'd sold a poor hound to a rich rancher. Trading was in his blood. No question of it, he had the best hounds in our district, but no one

got the pick of that fine pack when Tony sold a dog.

Then came this letter from Henderson over in the Grassy Flats district of Saskatchewan province.

"I hear you have the best coyote hounds in Alberta," wrote Henderson. "I've got the worst coyotes in Saskatchewan around my sheep ranch. I'd like to buy your best hound and arrange for it to meet our worst coyote. Name a day I can come and make a deal."

Tony showed us the letter. The notepaper had a mess of printing across the top which stated that Clem Henderson raised Suffolk sheep. There was a list of fairs where he had won prizes, and underneath he offered for sale the finest lambs, ewes, and rams available in Canada. There was nothing small about his brag.

"He's got pots o' money," gloated Tony. "Ho! I'll deal him out of a wad. He'll pay me plenty, and he won't get my best hound for his money."

It was Frew, studying that printed letterhead, who said:

"Henderson sounds shrewd, Tony. I bet he won't take a scrubby sort of dog like you usually peddle to strangers."

"He'll get what I want to sell him, and like it."

Frew looked speculative.

"Well, you know that red staghound o' yours—the one that'll run away from a mouse? I'll bet you fifty dollars you can't sell him that dog."

"Snooper?"

Tony stopped smiling. Snooper was a fine-looking hound, a mixture of Scottish stag and Irish wolfhound strains, but he was strictly a non-producer. He'd run a hole in the wind itself, right up with the fastest in the pack and maybe lead the bunch. But when the dogs got close to their quarry, Snooper got out of harm's way every time. Frightened of a jack rabbit, Snooper was, let alone a fang-weaponed coyote.

"I mean Snooper," nodded Frew. "I'll put up fifty that says you can't sell Henderson that worthless dog."

Tony saw that we were all watching and grinning at him and he hated to back down. Suddenly he threw back his head and let loose a roar of laughter.

"Okay, boys. Promise not to tip off Henderson in advance, and I'll deal him that no-good hound."

Frew drove us out to Tony's farm that day. The big fellow wasn't home when we got there, but a note was tacked on the door saying he'd be back shortly. Soon we heard the unmuffled roar of his truck coming across the prairie. Tony had been out after coyotes, and a dead one was slung up on the roof in the wire catch-all.

"Bait!" explained Warrso. He opened the trap-door to release the hounds and chained each one to its individual kennel scattered near the shack. "These dogs're pretty tired, so I'm going to leave them here. I wouldn't want Henderson to see any but nice fresh dogs to-day."

"Besides, these are your best hounds," Frew com-

mented drily. "It wouldn't do to show them off to a prospective buyer."

"That's right," grinned Tony, loading in Snooper and Cain, Pegs, Blackie, Belle, and Moe. They were a mixture of breeds and all smart runners, but not up to Tony's first string. Yet there were some real good hounds in the truck right then, not excepting Snooper himself when it came to the simple matter of fast running. It was lack of fight that kept Snooper from being a top-notcher; he just wouldn't grab and throw, despite the long jaw and the fierce blood-strains back of him.

In a few minutes Tony was ready and we set off for town to meet Henderson. A mile from Willowdale, Warrso stopped his truck. He climbed down and went back to the cages, while we wondered about the reason for the halt.

"Watch close, now," said Tony. "Here's how I'm going to outsmart that rancher man."

He opened one of the cage doors and grabbed Snooper's collar and pulled the red staghound outside. Then the man produced a rabbit's hind-pad and a can from the truck cab.

"The butcher gave me this blood I got here in the can," explained Tony.

He daubed it on Snooper's head, using the rabbit foot to brush it into the hair. There was a scratch or two on the dog's head where it had been slashed by kennel mates recently, and Tony daubed the blood thickly at such places. By the time he finished the hound was a gory-looking mess all around the head

and shoulders. Then Tony shuffled a wire barrier in place and boosted Snooper back into the cage, separating him from the other dogs to prevent them licking off the beef blood.

"It'll be dry by the time we reach town," Tony informed us. "Now remember, you boys keep quiet when I give my trade-talk."

"When you tell your lies, you mean," Frew muttered.

"Trade-talk," insisted Tony. "Like horse-trading, only ten times worse."

We drove to the hotel. Tony went into the lobby to find Henderson, while the rest of us crowded around his truck to stare at the dogs like a batch of strangers who'd just happened to come along and get curious. In a moment Tony came out, stooping over so he could talk with this runty little Clem Henderson.

"I came to buy your best hound, Warrso," said the Saskatchewan sheepman. "I don't want any has-beens or no-goods. Show me your best and I'll make you an offer, take it or leave it."

"Good!" beamed Tony. "That's the way I like to do business. But I've got no best hound, Mr. Henderson. Every dog in my pack is a top-notcher—I only keep the best. If you want one, just look 'em over and pick out the dog you like. Make your own choice, then you'll be fully satisfied with the deal."

"Fair enough," nodded Henderson. "But you're bound to have one hound that's better than all the rest. There's always got to be a leader. I want that leader-dog, see?"

"You pick it," said Tony. "All my dogs are good coyote catchers, if you know how to make 'em work."

"I know how."

Henderson stepped to the back of the truck and we moved aside to let him peer in at the dogs. Tony turned to wink at us. Just then this large, solemn Janis Henderson came out of the hotel and stood on the sidewalk nearby. A nicely turned-out big blonde, but kind of serious in the face. Tony saw her, and his girl-greeting smile spread over his countenance and he aimed that charm right at her. The girl couldn't help but see that Tony was making a play for her; she looked embarrassed, like she didn't know how to act when a man gave her the glad eye.

"I can't see 'em this way," Henderson complained. "Nobody can judge a hound while it's squatting in a cage. Will they run off if you turn 'em out?"

"Oh, no," answered Tony. "The only time they run off is when they see a coyote. They're trained to obey. Wait, I'll open up."

He tripped the release and out jumped the hounds. The big man flashed another smile up at the blonde and she became pink and turned away. Tony always did like large girls. He's a handsome buck, too, and there is no denying that he had a way with the ladies. Perhaps that was why Janis, when Tony turned back to Henderson, lost no time taking a good long look at the young fellow. We noticed all this by-play and nudged each other in amusement.

Meanwhile, Tony had started his trade-talk.

" That's Belle, and that's Moe, and this—g'wan, you red mutt ! " Tony aimed a kick at the Snooper dog, but missed. " He makes me so mad, that Snooper ! Ahhhh— That's Cain there, and here's Pegs. She's a little old, but she's a very smart hound just the same."

Tony moved over to give Pegs a pat, which brought him close to Snooper again and right away he kicked out, barely missing the staghound.

" G'wan ! " shouted Tony, in a savage way.

Henderson turned to look at the hound thus singled out.

" Hey, what's wrong with him ? He been in a fight, or something ? "

" He's always in a fight," Tony grumbled. " Look at the blood all over him."

" Mmmmmm ! Why's that ? "

" Because he's a darn trouble-maker." Tony turned away abruptly. " Look at Moe here, Mr. Henderson. He's got police-dog strain in him, which makes him a killer. How's he appeal to you ? "

" He looks okay," Henderson said, but he kept staring at Snooper's long-geared frame. Anyone could see that Snooper was built for speed, fast like the Irish and rugged like the Scottish hounds. The dog had the long jaw of a killer too, while his eyes were bright and intelligent in the hound way. " Say, Warrso, I happened to notice that you had this one penned separate from the pack. What's the reason for that ? "

" Him ? " Snooper dodged another kick, then

stood off to one side, fanning his tail and laughing at us with his lean jaws. The dog knew that Tony was only pretending about the kicks, though Henderson didn't realize it was all an act. "Ahhh— Now here's Cain, Mr. Henderson. He's pure Irish wolfhound, and I got registered papers for him. He's a fine dog."

"Not bad," nodded Henderson, taking half a glance. "But the dog that takes my fancy is this red hound you call Snooper."

"That mutt?" Tony sounded annoyed. "Maybe he looks okay, but looks don't count for too much." Tony turned away, almost hastily. "This one here is something special. Blackie, I call him, though he's really a blue roan. He's a Borzoi. See how deep his chest is? He's got lots o' wind for a long chase."

"Uh-huh," Henderson nodded, then turned back to Snooper and walked around the red stag to study him from a different angle. This put him in a position to see the coyote, dead in the catch-all on the roof of the truck. "Hey, I see you got a coyote up there. Which of your hounds caught it?"

"Oh, that!" Tony eyed the coyote as though he'd never been properly introduced to it. "Well, we caught it on the way to town. Just happened to see it, so I turned the dogs loose and Zing! Ahhh— Now look at Belle here; she's a little small, but she's very fast. It's the greyhound strain, see? Very good on flat country like you have in Saskatchewan."

"Too small," said Henderson. "I asked you a question, Warrso. Which hound caught that coyote?"

"The coyote?" Tony repeated, sounding stupid. "Get back, you red mutt! Ahhhh— Well, which hound d'you want to buy?"

"Quit hedging," Henderson said, sharp and shrewd. "This Snooper dog caught it, didn't he?"

Tony looked unhappy, giving his head the merest nod. This made the rancher smile in a self-satisfied way and he stared again at the red stag.

"Now, then— Tell me why you're so mad at him?"

"I got plenty o' reason." Tony aimed another kick in Snooper's direction, his big hands starting to wave as he went into his real trade-talk. Just then he saw the big blonde standing on the hotel steps, watching. Tony's chest puffed out and his smile widened; he liked having a lady audience. "It's this way. I go driving across the prairie, scouting for coyotes. When I see one I steer the car that way and step on the gas. I'll get three, maybe two hundred yards from the coyote, then I pull the lever and drop the doors so's the hounds can jump out. Right away they see the coyote and start running. This Snooper dog, he's the one that always gets out in front. Every time he races away out in front of the whole pack. Soon he catches up to the coyote, grabs 'im by the neck, and Zing! the coyote's dead. Then Snooper turns around quick to face the other hounds, all strung out and coming fast. First hound that gets near, Snooper grabs him by the throat, shakes him, and throws him back. The poor dog goes scuttling away, hurt and whimpering. Next hound that comes along, Snooper does the same

thing again. He never lets any other hound get near that coyote. Every time, he thinks the coyote belongs only to him. It makes me so darn' mad, because it spoils all my other hounds, see? If he don't quit fighting, he'll cause 'em to lose interest in coyotes and that'll spoil them."

"Mmmmmm!" nodded Henderson, all smiles. "Well, your troubles are over, because that's the hound I'm buying."

"Huh?" Tony looked startled. "Ohhhh, now wait!" He clapped a hand over his mouth, as though realizing too late that he had said too much. "No, no; you wouldn't want him!"

"That's the dog I choose. How much?"

"Please, Mr. Henderson! I don't want to sell Snooper. He's the one that catches all the coy— I mean, I just don't want to sell him."

"You told me to take my pick," Henderson declared. "He's the one I want. What's your asking price?"

"But look, all my other hounds are wonderful dogs. You can take any one of 'em you like. But Snooper: no! Why, last week he caught nine coyotes in four days. You just can't have him, 'cause he's not for sale!"

Henderson was strutting like a bantam rooster, sure that he had selected the finest dog in the pack. He patted Snooper on the head, whereupon the big hound fawned his jaws up at the little man and wagged his long tail. That pleased Henderson, too.

"Everything's got a price, Warrso," the sheep-rancher said, pulling out his wallet. "If you won't

name a sum, I'll make an offer. Here's a hundred dollars for him."

Tony stopped looking mournful. Glancing at the money, he threw back his head and laughed.

"Ho! That's real funny! You hear what he said, fellas?"

Henderson stood there with the money in his hand, getting red around the jowl-wattles while Tony laughed.

"That's my offer!" he snapped.

With a great effort, Tony managed to control his mirth and became serious again.

"You mean, you're not joking? You really think I'd sell a hound for a hundred dollars?"

"Now listen, Warrso! Where I come from a hundred dollars is a whoppin' big price for a hound-dog!"

Tony shook his head in wonder.

"Well, you'll have to excuse me, Mr. Henderson, 'cause I thought you were being funny on purpose. Maybe you better forget all about buying a hound from me and go back to Grassy Flats and get one there. A hundred dollars wouldn't buy any of my dogs. Come on, pack: jump in!"

"Wait!" barked Henderson, keeping a hand on the red stag's collar. "I don't like haggling, man, but I really want this hound. I'll raise my offer another twenty-five dollars."

"Ho! Maybe that's good money for dogs where you live, sir, but my hounds are coyote-catchers. Pelts are selling for fifteen dollars each right now. I got

nine coyotes last week and one more this morning. At fifteen dollars per skin, that's a hundred and fifty dollars for about five days running. And you want me to sell Snooper for a hundred and twenty-five dollars— To me, it sounds funny ! "

We could not help grinning in admiration of Tony's trading act. Poor Henderson probably thought we rated him as a cheap-skate, because he scowled and rapped out :

" Two hundred dollars ! "

He glared at us as though daring us to laugh. But this time we stayed serious. Especially Frew, because of the fifty-dollar bet he'd made.

" Two hundred dollars ? " repeated Tony. " Look, Mr. Henderson, I'm sorry you came all the way from Grassy Flats, 'cause I should have mentioned prices in my letter to save you the trouble." Then he became thoughtful, and said : " Tell you what, sir. For a couple hundred dollars, I'll sell you a puppy. He's not been run yet, understand, but he's got good blood in him. Snooper's the sire, and Pegs here is the mother. That pup'll grow into a good hound and catch you a lot of coyotes if you train him right. I'll let one o' that batch o' pups go for two hundred, just because you've come all the way from Saskatchewan to buy a dog."

" I'm not crazy, Warrso ; I don't want an untried pup. Name your price for the red hound."

" Ah, no ! Pick any other dog you like. Belle's a little small, and Pegs is maybe a little old, but they're both good hounds. Moe's got a wonderful killing

jaw when he gets close, though he's a bit slow in rough country. I'm telling you the whole truth about them, see? Blackie here takes time to get going good, but he'll run for miles. Tell you what I'll do. You take your pick out of any of these other hounds for three hundred dollars each, and forget about Snooper."

The sheep-rancher snapped: "How much for Snooper?"

"Please, now. I just don't want to sell him."

"You told me I could take my pick," Henderson stated. "You fellows here are witnesses to that statement. This is my choice, and I'm asking how much?"

"Well, now." Tony sounded unhappy about the whole affair. "Hounds are funny, Mr. Henderson. Sometimes they won't work good for some people. I've raised Snooper from a pup and know just how he works. For you—Poof! He mightn't ever catch you a single coyote, so you'd be better off with one of these other dogs who're more reliable."

"You don't like Snooper and you know it. Stop stalling and name a price."

Tony rubbed his chin.

"Maybe that's right about me not liking the red mutt too much, 'cause I get awful sore at him when he fights the other hounds. But he catches coyotes, and I like that part a whole lot!"

"I'll pay you three hundred and fifty dollars for him."

"No, Mr. Henderson; I guess we don't do business. Come on, pack: jump in!"

" Wait ! " Henderson barked. " I'll make you my final offer. Four hundred, spot cash ! And listen, Warrso ; if you sell Snooper, you'll be able to work the rest of your pack without any more fights. You'll catch the same number of coyotes, but without all the scrapping that gets your dander up now. Four hundred is my top limit, and I'll thank you to think it over."

Tony looked at his boots. Frew became hopeful again, knowing that the sheep-rancher meant what he said about going no higher. Tony knew that, too, but it would have made Henderson suspicious if he accepted the money too quickly. So Tony scuffed his boots in the dirt. He looked over at the red stag-hound. Almost absent-mindedly, he patted Pegs, then petted Moe and Belle. Snooper came close to get his share of the affection, and quick as a flash Tony whacked at the red hound.

" He makes me so mad ! Ahhhh— D'you really think the other dogs would work better as a pack, if I got rid of him ? "

" I know they would." Henderson extracted bills from his wallet, shuffling them with expert fingers. " Here's the four hundred."

He placed the money in Tony's seemingly reluctant hand.

" Well— All right, sir ; he's yours ! "

" Good ! "

As the deal was closed, the big blonde came down from the hotel steps.

"Dad, I'll help you load Snooper into the car."

Tony turned and stared admiringly as the girl advanced.

"This is your daughter, heh? Miss, I'm Tony Warrso, and very pleased to meet you—very pleased! I'll be glad to help you load the hound if you'll show me your car, Miss."

"Okay," nodded Henderson. "Warrso, there's some things I want to ask you about running that dog. I'll wait for you in the hotel lobby."

The shrivelled little man walked away, muttering about the high cost of dealing with Albertans.

Tony promptly turned on his best girl-pleasing line of talk and Frew and the rest of us backed away to give him some privacy. In any case, the deal we had wanted to witness was finished; Frew had lost his bet. We went across to the Regal for some coffee. None of us was surprised when Janis and Tony showed up five minutes later and Tony ushered her into one of the quiet back booths. We could hear the persuasive rumble of his voice and the laughter of the large blonde.

A fast worker, that Tony. In practically no time at all he had that solemn girl happy as a birthday-party kid and all promised up to be his bride if Clem Henderson would approve.

The hotel clerk told us the rest. Tony came proudly in with the girl, who blushed scarlet when she saw her father sitting in the lobby looking angry. Tony became flustered and shambled over to the little rancher and fumbled with his ski cap. Finally he blurted out that he wanted to marry the girl.

"Marry my daughter? Heavens, man: you just met her!"

"I know, but I make up my mind pretty fast."

"Well, it sure took you long enough on that hound deal."

Tony got red. He twisted the ski cap in his fingers until the seams popped, then he reached into a pocket and pulled out Henderson's four hundred dollars.

"Here's your money back, sir. I did some trade-talking. Snooper's no good; he never caught a coyote in all his life."

"What!"

"That's the truth," Tony admitted. "I wouldn't want to cheat you, now that I want to marry Janis."

Henderson picked up the money, his face flushed with rage.

"So that's the kind of man you are, eh?"

"I guess so," Tony nodded miserably. "But I've made it all straight again, by giving back the money."

Clem Henderson saw Janis watching him with her solemn eyes. Suddenly a tight smile formed on Henderson's grim mouth. He pushed the money back into Tony's hand.

"Let the deal stand, Warrso. You can marry Janis if she wants you. When it comes right down to it, son, that's the kind of man I am myself!"

Tony has been married two years now and most people think he has done very well for himself by marrying a clever manager like Janis. He's got a nice home and is prospering. He ploughs and plants his

land like any other farmer, feeding pigs and steers and even helping his wife tend a large flock of turkeys. During the winter he is able to slip off with his hounds when Janis is in town shopping or away visiting some of the neighbours. She is rather strict, this big blonde Janis, about what a husband should do with his spare time.

Frew went out to see Tony the other day. The big fellow was out behind the barn where Janis makes him keep the hound pack. Tony began talking about the easy, carefree times of the past when he was single, and eventually he got around to old Clem Henderson and what the Saskatchewan rancher had said at the time he gave his consent to the marriage.

"A smart fellow, that Henderson," Tony told Frew. "He's having a fine time with no Janis to boss him around. But I've got her steady, pushing me to work all the time. Well, now— Seems to me that old Henderson knows a lot more about trading than I ever did!"

VII

Busy as a Beaver

JIMMY TODD leaned the landing-net against a creel, then Sue handed him the life-sized cardboard fisherman. Jimmy stood the figure at one end of the display window, fastening a fly rod to the paper angler's hand with a special clip. A line was threaded through the rod guides and looped across the short space between fisherman and a large mirror, which had been one of their wedding presents. At the end of the leader Jimmy tied a huge Royal Coachman fly. A cardboard Brook Trout, mouth agape, seemed to be leaping out of the mirrored pool and trying to bite the lure.

"There—it's finished!" he announced. "All we

need now is a great big hunk of luck for our opening day."

Sue said : " Getting an empty store in the first place was a lucky break."

Willowdale was booming, hence business premises were in demand. They had been able to rent an old shop formerly occupied by a shoemaker, but Jimmy mourned that their repainted and shined-up store was nearly two blocks from the main intersection. Their only business neighbour was Pete Popovitch the plumber, and people who urgently needed a plumber's services were not apt to detour into Todd's Sporting Goods.

" It looks grand," said Sue, with a happy smile. " Rods, reels, golf clubs, and everything ! "

Jimmy gave her brunette curls a tiny tug.

" What we need is some special drawing-card," he muttered. " Something so different that people'd just flock around to see it."

" How about you shooting apples off my head with that bow and arrow outfit ? "

The newly-weds held hands as they locked the door and peered again at the darkened window.

" Stop worrying," Sue scolded softly.

Jimmy tucked her arm through his as they walked away from the small, isolated store.

" I'm not exactly worrying, Sue ; I'm just wishing for a great big hunk of luck for our opening day."

Their luck was only a hundred feet away at that moment, but the young man and his pretty bride did

not know that. They reached the neon lights of the business section and greeted Chief of Police Tom David, then all three turned to stare back down the side street as they heard the excited barking of a dog. Nothing could be seen, however, so Jimmy and Sue went home and Chief David smiled after them in a fatherly way.

The dog was barking at a beaver. It was moving-time for the full-grown kits of last year's beaver families, and this young animal had left his home pond on Willow Creek that very evening. The beaver swam downstream until it reached the shallows near Widow Master's home, and there the animal had gone ashore to dine on a mushroom. Instead of returning to the winding creek, instinct told the rodent that a larger stream was nearby. The beaver headed overland towards the river, but became confused among the town streets. And fifty feet from a store building a fox-terrier sighted the beaver and barked.

The water animal hurried faster and clicked its teeth. Right about then the terrier charged, whereupon the beaver scuttled into the doorway of Jimmy Todd's store. The dog bit it, but the beaver whirled and quickly evened the score. Whereupon the terrier yowled and went home at full gallop.

A collie came to investigate the hubbub. This collie was a cautious sort and did not want to get involved in anything nasty. The beaver stayed in the narrow doorway, hissing whenever the collie came close. Both animals finally sat back on their haunches and watched each other warily.

By morning the collie had reinforcements of one exuberant cocker spaniel, a rat-tailed retriever inclined to be bored about the whole affair, and a Boston Bull terrier who wheezed and snuffled as it informed the neighbourhood that it and some chums had cornered a beaver.

" Ah, the poor thing ! " cried Sue, when they came to open their store. The animal peered up at her uncertainly. Jimmy reached over and inserted a key into the lock, swung wide the door, and the beaver turned and waddled in and away from the pestering dogs.

" Beat it ! " Jimmy told the collie and his friends.

Sue opened their lunch-basket, saying :

" I put an apple in here, and I once read that beavers love apples."

" You're all wrong," Jimmy told her. " Beavers eat poplar bark and stuff like that."

" Well, I'm sure I read that the zoo variety likes apples. Try one, Buster."

The beaver had gone to the back of the store, where it backed into a corner and peered worriedly around at the array of fishing-tackle and other sporting goods. When Sue held out half an apple, the animal's nostrils quivered briefly. Then it reached hand-like front paws for the fruit and hungrily munched on it.

" Good for you, Buster ! " cheered Sue.

" I'll bet he'd like a drink," Jimmy said. " Looks like the dogs had him backed into our doorway all night long. I'll trot over to Pete Popovitch's place and get him a pail of water."

Sue hunkered down, talking soothingly to the beaver all the while. As Jimmy watched, the girl slowly reached out a hand and gave Buster a gentle pat on the back.

"He likes me," marvelled Sue.

"So do I," smiled Jimmy. "I'll get the water, then we can figure out what to do with Buster."

Jimmy discovered that plumbers do not keep pails in stock. However, at that moment Pete was soldering a tin baby bath and hustled the job when he heard about the dog-pestered beaver.

"I bet he bit my dog," said Sparky Frew, who was Pete's helper. "My fox-terrier came yelping home last night with a big gash on his shoulder."

"Well, this beaver seems a friendly sort," said Jimmy. "Sue's feeding him slices of apple right now."

"Sonavagun!" exclaimed Pete. "This I gotta see!"

He carried the tin tub to a tap, then helped Jimmy take the filled bath across to the sport store. Sparky trailed behind them, describing his terrier's injuries in detail.

Buster crawled into the tub and had himself a soaking while lapping up a drink, after which the animal climbed out and combed his sleek brown fur with the special hind claw reserved for primping.

"I'll bet you his hide's worth forty or fifty dollars," suggested Frew.

Sue was horrified at the very idea.

"Don't worry," Jimmy countered, stroking the animal's head. "Nobody's going to skin our Buster."

"Well, he bit my dog," repeated Sparky.

Sue opened the lunch basket again.

"We've got mostly salmon sandwiches to-day, with a couple of peanut butter ones for dessert."

She offered both types. Buster stopped his toilet, wrinkled his nose briefly, and quickly made a choice. He sat up on his haunches, balancing on his broad flat tail as he munched the sandwich and made queer grimaces as the gooey peanut butter stuck to his teeth.

"Sonavagun!" laughed Pete. "I'm gonna get my family. They'll want a good close look at this."

He hurried away, while Sparky Frew muttered darkly about paying taxes to protect dogs from vicious wild animals and went off to get the police. Sue and Jimmy were discussing Buster's future when Pete's car braked to a stop outside and his stout wife and four children rushed in, their eyes shining with excitement. Chief Tom David came with Frew. The policeman did not arrest the beaver as Sparky had hoped, but merely watched with smiling approval while Sue fed Buster the last peanut butter sandwich. Then the Chief helped Jimmy and Pete string a badminton net across the back corner of the shop to fence Buster away from Pete's eager children.

"Time for school," their mother said. She repeated that announcement at least three times, then got hold of assorted ears and arms and dragged her charges away from the interesting animal.

The little store was becoming more crowded every minute. Miss Handy, the town stenographer, cooed like a pigeon over Buster's antics, while Doctor Gray and his nurse bustled in for a look. When Pete Popovitch took a bolt-action rifle from the wall rack and snecked the mechanism, Buster was startled by the sharp noise and promptly slapped his tail on the back part of the baby bath. This sent a wave of water splashing all over Frew, who mopped himself off with some indignation and repeated to Chief David that there ought to be a law.

" He didn't mean it," apologized Sue. She stroked Buster's head, whereupon the beaver mewed in a soft tone and snuggled against his benefactress. " I think he's still hungry, but he doesn't care for our salmon sandwiches. Jimmy, could we get him some apples ? "

" I'll get 'em for you," offered the policeman.

Which was just as well, because Jimmy was busy selling the rifle to Pete and also trying to explain the technique of spin-fishing to Bill Gray. Benny Roche the druggist came in, also Dooley Harper from his grocery. As Sue explained about the young beaver, Benny hefted a new golf club while Dooley inspected a combination leader and fly box.

" I'll take this," he said to Jimmy, who was accepting the doctor's cheque for the spinning outfit.

Sparky Frew found an unexpected ally in Hagen, the furniture dealer, who had a theory that beavers were part of the national heritage and therefore could not be kept as private pets. Jimmy argued with him

while trying to convince Benny Roche that the club handle was long enough if he used the double-lock grip favoured by the best golfers.

Pete's children told their school chums about the tame beaver at Jimmy Todd's store. The teachers believed that a lesson in natural history might be of academic interest, hence the whole population of the public school came marching down Poplar Street. Sue suggested a single-file procession, which the teachers quickly organized. The children walked in and looked at Buster, then reluctantly turned the corner around Judge Benn, who was waving a fly rod and beaming benignly on the whole assembly. When the kiddies went out, they gleefully reported to the waiting line-ups that Buster was the Very Best Beaver they'd ever seen.

Mayor Fred Oliver arrived, brought by Fat Hagen, who still insisted that nobody could pen up part of the nation's natural resources without a government permit or something.

" We're just trying to do the right thing," protested Jimmy, trying to attend to customers while demonstrating a casting-reel to Sparky Frew. " If we turn him loose, all the dogs in town would gang up on him."

" He nearly killed my dog," retorted Sparky, paying for the reel.

" You've no proof that Buster did it."

" Well, I'll bring my Gippy and we'll match the cut with your beaver's teeth."

"I need a new tapered trout line," said Funeral Director Smathers, after paying his respects to Buster.

Reverend Tanner came for a look; Sue let the delighted minister feed Buster a sliver of apple. Then Mrs. Soapy Smith came with Beulah Gainsborough, dressmaker and alterations to order, and both ladies gushed baby talk over the tweet ittle beaver. Parson Tanner flashed Sue a wink and went to the counter to buy a cork float and a box of hooks. This gave the schoolboys an idea: they shelled out dimes and quarters for tackle as they filed past Jimmy, informing him that the suckers were on the downstream run in Willow Creek.

After the younger children had marched away, the high school principal came and peered studiously at Buster through thick lenses and listened while Hagen argued that it was wrong to fence in beavers who belonged to the public. The principal asked Sue if he might bring all the high school students for a look at this wonderful animal engineer. Meanwhile, Buster had left the tub again to curl up on an old auto blanket Chief David contributed to his comfort. Sue was now watching Buster's diet, as she believed that he had eaten too much. She sliced an apple into tiny fragments and only let special visitors feed the animal.

"Bring them all," she told the principal.

"It's against the law," declared Hagen, trying to enlist support from Judge Benn. The Judge stated that he would have to consult his books to find out if there had been any legal precedent. Meanwhile,

he wished to point out that Sue and Jimmy Todd were actually befriending the beaver.

"You should'a seen how that beaver befriended my dog!" said Frew.

"I'll have a dozen Black Gnats and six of the Blue Upright dry flies," Judge Benn told Jimmy. "This beaver matter is really the game warden's problem."

"Don Cully is out of town," the Chief added. "I'll buy this sixteen-inch creel, Jimmy, 'cause I'm catching bigger ones this season!"

The high school students filed into the crowded store, a few of the youngsters being allowed to touch Buster's rubbery-looking black tail.

"It isn't scaled, as some folks think," said Sue. Farnham J. Brown, the naturalist, had come for a look at Buster and brought her a text on North American Mammals. Between smiles at visitors and agreeing with Beulah Gainsborough that Buster was just about the cutest thing ever, Sue read the facts on beavers. Average weight of adults: 30 to 40 pounds. Average length: 40 inches overall, with the tail measuring 16 inches long by $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. Food: poplar and willow bark, various leaves, and tender shoots of streamside plants, but chiefly poplar bark.

"You were right about that bark item, Jimmy," she called out to her busy husband.

"Good!"

Hagen began tinkering with a target air pistol while arguing about Buster. Jimmy argued right back as he showed the furniture dealer how to operate the gun.

Sue gleaned more beaver facts from Mr. Brown's book. How the animals built dams to create deep ponds where they would be safely moated from enemies, and how they cached a winter food supply of bark-covered branches in the deepest pool behind the dams.

" His Latin name is *Castor canadensis*," she informed the gaping students.

By noontime Jimmy was sold out of trout flies except for some gaudy Yellow Sallys which Hap Streeter told him were worthless. Hap knew his flies ; being the town bum gave him more time for fishing than anyone else, so Jimmy listened to his advice while trying to ward off queries by Al the garageman. Al wanted to know if they intended to put Buster in a zoo.

Sue and Jimmy ate the salmon sandwiches that Buster rejected, then got back to work. The store was jammed throughout the noon hour, when clerks and office workers came to see the beaver during their free time. Cec Farlow was delighted with Buster, who ate one of the dill pickles Cec was taking home.

" Look at 'im pucker up ! " chuckled Cec.

" It might give him a stomach ache," Sue scolded.

Cec retreated from her wrath and went to the counter, where he bought an archery set of lemonwood bow with six target arrows, armguard, finger tab and instruction book. He was worried about his weight and planned to hike through the Sandhills every evening and shoot at stumps with the archery weapons.

Frew came back after lunch carrying Gippy the fox-terrier. Gippy whimpered with terror at sight of the beaver, while Buster clicked his teeth angrily. Sparky was asked to take his dog elsewhere, and fast.

"That's proof he bit my Gippy," he yelled. "They're enemies, see?"

Farmers came to town during the afternoon, it being Pig Shipping Day. They soon heard about the beaver in Jimmy's store and came around for a look. One fellow took a telescope sight for his .22 rifle; Dan Marks wanted a magnum shotgun and Jimmy had to write down all the details about drop of stock at comb and heel, 28-inch barrels, and new type of recoil pad. One cattleman bought a badminton outfit to set up in the hay loft of his barn, where his family could enjoy games. A few of the country folk drove back to their home districts and fetched students from rural schools to have a look at the beaver. The little store was continually crowded and Sue became hoarse from lecturing on sizes and habits of beavers in general and Buster in particular.

By this time the animal seemed to be suffering from the afternoon's heat. Chief David noticed this and went over to Roche's drug-store and came back with a double handful of ice-cream cones. One he gave to Sue, one to the perspiring Jimmy, and one to Buster, all the rest going to children who chanced to be in the store at the moment. Buster started eating his ice cream just as the Willowdale Women's Club arrived. The ladies had met at Mrs. Masters' home,

where they began discussing gladioli and ended by passing an early motion to adjourn so that they could all visit Buster the beaver. Buster licked at the cone, mewing loudly with pleasure but flinching comically whenever he got a full mouthful of the frozen confection. Finishing the treat, Buster disregarded the theory that one should not swim on a full stomach and climbed gratefully into the tub of fresh water Pete Popovitch and the grumbling Frew brought from across the street.

"Give us the full lecture," urged Mrs. Masters, while the ladies gazed at Sue with rapt attention.

"Well, then," began Sue. "Beavers are the largest rodent animals on this continent——"

"Tell 'em they belong to the whole nation," interjected Fat Hagen.

"Don't interrupt!" snapped Mrs. Masters. "Go on, my dear."

Sue went on, while Jimmy and his customers whispered as they discussed the merits of plastic waders and a golf putting apparatus for home-lawn use.

Closing-time finally came and Sue was not sorry. She was terribly tired. So was Jimmy, but he was also beaming. There was scarcely any sporting goods left on shelves or walls or in counter drawers, while he had a fat bookful of orders waiting to be filled as soon as he could get in new stock. Both Judge Benn and Hap Streeter had advised him to install half a dozen comfortable chairs, because they wanted to make Jimmy's store the headquarters for the angling

fraternity, where catches and techniques could be talked over at leisure. Jimmy knew that Todd's Sporting Goods was successfully established.

Chief Tom David shooed Hagen and Al the garageman out of the shop, staying inside himself and mopping his florid brow with a large bandana as he nodded at Buster.

"What happens to him now?"

"Well, it's really up to Sue," said Jimmy. "If she wants to keep Buster for a pet, that's fine. But personally——"

Jimmy lapsed into silence, patting Buster with one hand and putting the other arm around his tired wife. She smiled up at him.

"You feel just like I do about this nice little fellow. You think it's time that Buster the Beaver went home, don't you?"

"That's right," nodded Jimmy. "Maybe Fat Hagen has a point about us not being within our rights in keeping him, and I'm all against sending Buster off to be caged in a city zoo. Seems to me he'd be a lot happier if we just turned him loose at the river and let him live his own life."

"I'm with you all the way," agreed Sue.

"So am I," added the policeman. "Wait a minute, folks. I'll get my car and we'll transport Buster in style."

The Chief told everybody he met. Soon cars were lined up on both sides of the street near Jimmy's store. Fathers, mothers, children; farmers, businessmen, clerks: half the people of town and country seemed

to be there. Sue and Jimmy entered the Chief's car, with Buster on the seat between them and proving a model passenger as they led the procession along main street to the bridge. Once there, people lined the railings while Sue and Jimmy carried Buster down the steep bank to the river's edge.

The beaver began mewing with excitement as they neared the water. Sue gave him a final pat ; so did Jimmy. Then Buster was set down. The animal plunged right in and dived, coming to the surface fifty feet out from shore. He slapped his tail resoundingly when the people cheered. Then the beaver headed downstream, swimming under the bridge and going swiftly towards the far bend of the river.

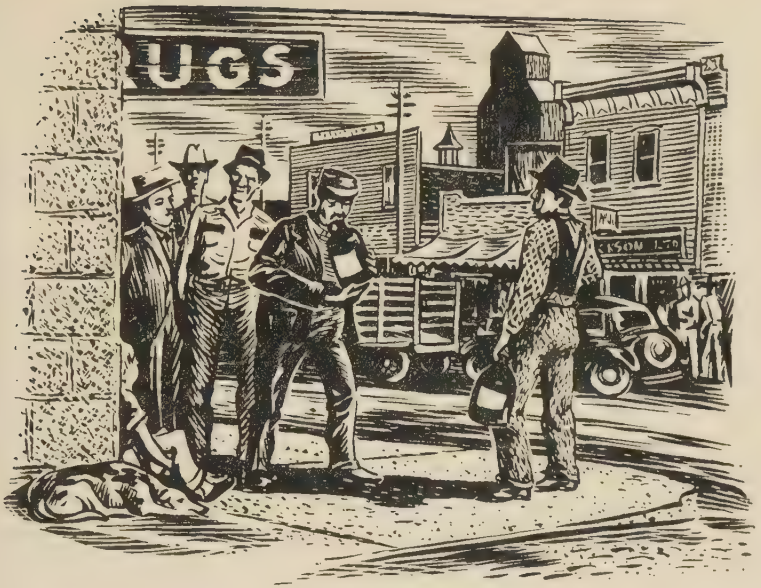
" Good-bye, Buster."

Sue's voice faltered and broke. Jimmy tenderly wiped away her tears.

" I feel like crying myself," he said, as they watched the small brown head disappear around the bend. " Thanks for bringing us all that luck, Buster ! "

Then Chief Tom David's shout rang out : " Three cheers for Sue and Jimmy Todd, folks ! "

And Sparky Frew was the first to shout hurrah !



VIII

Bootleg Brains

"HOW'RE you feeling, Hap?"

"Too poor for likker to help, boys. This time, I got me some inside hurts."

"Have you been to see Doc Gray?"

"Naw. My poke's too empty for hospitals and sech."

"But the Doctor wouldn't fuss about that, and neither would the hospital board."

"Maybe not," admitted Hap. "But I aims to hang on to my self-respect. I figger a man cain't do that if he owes money he knows is impossible to pay. Just

leave me worry it out by myself, boys ; I'll figger something."

He wasn't such a bad old bum, even if Streeter was our town bootlegger. There was nothing furtive or ashamed about Hap, despite his outlawed activities. Some of us have been in Baldy's barber shop when Judge Benn himself was being shaved, and right in front of the jurist Hap would talk about the fascinating mysteries of distilling. He was noted for a white poteen that packed a wicked wallop, a chokecherry wine that would grace any table in the land, while Hap's own favourite was a special liqueur sort of drink he made out of bog cranberries.

Chief Tom David had led Hap before the courts two or three times on small violations, though our plump chief was extremely fond of Hap. However, the policeman never got wise to Streeter's hoarding-place. Tom David searched Hap's cabin from attic to cellar more than once, then went out and used a flash-light in Streeter's root-cellar too. Hap loved to grow things, especially berry crops from which he could ferment his wines. He even made wine out of fat old swede turnips, while any of the long rows of parsnips and other vegetables in his back yard or heaped in the root-cellar bins could be considered as potential head-aches for someone. But Chief David never learned the secret of Hap's root-cellar stairs ; behind the hinged steps there was a neat little dug-out holding bottles and jugs.

" Find ary of interest, Tom ? " Hap would ask, his eyes merry with twinkles.

" Drat it all ! I know you've got it hid somewhere, but I can't locate it anywhere. After me swearing out a search warrant to look, too."

" 'S a bad shame," Hap Streeter would say in a soothing way. " To help you feel better, let's you an' me go fishing. I'd purely love a feed o' crisp-fried pickerel."

So they'd go down to the mouth of Willow Creek, the town bootlegger and our salaried stalwart of law and order. And no one thought less of either for their staunch friendship.

Because, with all his faults, Hap Streeter had a man's strict code. He wouldn't pass a bottle to a boy, nor yet to a full-grown man who didn't behave when in his cups. He wasn't a dance-hall moonshiner, where a liquor-heated head could easily cause some serious harm. Hap only made quality brew, never in quantities enough to pile money high on his hand.

Perhaps he was too lazy ; perhaps it was just his way of living. Fishing-time or hunting-season, Hap Streeter would be there with the gang. He never mixed sport with drinking, but he never missed either his sport or his drink. You'd hear of him being over at Corby's place, guzzling half the night while swapping tall tales with the boys. Next day he'd be up or down stream from the sober Judge Benn on Wolf Creek, taking fully as many trout as the dry-fly magistrate and providing excellent company to boot. And no woman complained to the law that her man was spending too much on outlaw booze, because Hap

Streeter would pass a bottle in friendship rather than charge a man who could ill afford to spend.

Hence he was mostly shy of money. He put a high value on his workless freedom and did not stir to bind himself to a job in order to furnish his cabin better or to buy a car or to dress up in Sunday clothes. His garden raised his food and quite a lot of his drink, fishing and hunting put fries in his skillet, while the woodlands had yielded the logs to build his cabin and gave him fuel for the warming fires inside it. Sugar was his chief expense. To buy it and the yeast and spices his brewing needed, Hap Streeter sold a bottle here and a jug there to a few friends who appreciated fine drink or strong belly-twisters.

This loafing poverty of Hap's was no detriment to his enjoyment of life while he was healthy. But for over a year the man had been ailing. We'd see his jovial face turn suddenly grey with pain, nor could he ignore his decline in weight and absence of vitality. Once he could walk the legs off any partridge hunter in Willowdale ; once he thought nothing of a twelve-mile climb over Steep Mount to reach Spring Lake for an evening's trout-casting. But all that was a year in the past ; now Streeter was a sick man.

" Go see Doc Gray and find out what's wrong," everyone advised.

" Look, Hap," Chief David said. " I need a check-up myself. Come along with me and we'll learn how many years of fishing we've got left."

Hap's stubborn pride kept him away from the doctor's office. Bill Gray even called at Hap's cabin,

tipped off to the bootlegger's illness by Chief David, Judge Benn, and other friends. Hap visited sociably with the doctor, offering his best wine in hospitality, but he would not submit to an examination.

"I just cain't afford it," he bluntly said. "Likewise, I cain't afford no debt. 'Twould mean I'd have to turn out an' get me a job o' work to pay off that debt, and I'm purely out of practice with any kind o' steady working system."

The illness went from bad to worse. The fishing pools were deserted by Hap, while hunters could no longer coax him along to guide out the best places for grouse or ducks.

"I'll figger something," Hap kept repeating. Meanwhile, he was a pain-wracked man and we were all sorry for the old bum.

Then one day Tom David saw Hap go slouching along main street with a brown jug trailing from each hand. In broad daylight, mind you, right in the business section of Willowdale.

"What's in the jugs, Hap?" the Chief asked, knowing that half the folks on the street had already seen those brown-glass flagons and had their strong suspicions about the contents.

"Might be vin'gar for pickle-making," answered Streeter, easy and mild spoken as always.

"Mind if I take a sniff?" suggested Tom, so Hap wearily set down the heavy jugs and obediently uncorked a top. The policeman raised it to his nose and inhaled. "Wheewwwwww! I didn't know you

made stuff that strong! Hap, I know you aren't feeling up to scratch, but have you taken leave of your senses entirely?"

"Meanin' what, Tom?"

"Meaning you know that I'll have to arrest you," the policeman grumbled. "Here you are, carrying bootleg liquor on main street with the whole town looking on. You've dared me into making an arrest, and you know it. What's come over you, Hap?"

"Well, I just don't feel too bright, an' that's a fact," said Streeter, and meekly followed Tom to the courtroom.

Judge Benn is a fair man, but there was no doubt whatsoever about Hap Streeter's guilt. He pleaded guilty to possessing bootleg brew and to making it, though he refused to reveal the name of the customer to whom he had been carrying the drink.

"The fine is rather severe for bootleg offences," Judge Benn commented, looking grave. "Hmmmmm! In fact, the minimum fine is three hundred dollars, plus costs of the Court."

Baldy the barber climbed nervously to his feet in the back row of benches, cleared his throat, and begged leave to address the Court. Judge Benn granted permission. Baldy gulped down his Adam's apple a couple of times, then said that a number of Hap Streeter's friends had heard about his predicament. They'd whipped around a hat and he, Baldy, was present to pay Hap's fine in full.

"No!" protested Streeter. "Thank'ee kindly,

Baldy ; and say my best thanks to all the boys back o' you. It purely touches me in a feeling place, these gen'rous doings. But you shorely know I cain't let you do it and still hold on to my pride. Judge, could I ask what's the spell in jail, if'n I cain't pay no fine money ? "

Judge Benn consulted the law-book and soon produced an answer, though it was plain enough that he did not enjoy his part of the proceedings.

" The penalty is three months in jail, and the law specifies that the sentence must impose ' hard labour '."

Hap Streeter flinched at that mention of work, but he straightened up manfully and said, clearly and plain :

" I'll serve the time ! "

Chief Tom David rode the train with Hap, taking him over to Point Penitentiary. The pudgy policeman felt very badly about it, too, though Hap himself talked cheerily on the trip about their many fishing-jaunts and recalled some of their best catches. When they approached the forbidding stone walls of the provincial jail, Hap fumbled a little for words ; his misdeeds had never got him as close to a prison gate before. Then he seemed to call upon some inner courage. Tom David told us that Hap had to speak the joke-words at the parting inside, when Streeter was set to go through an iron-barred door in the custody of a guard.

Our Chief refused a ride back to the railway station from the jail, wishing to walk so that he could be

alone with his unhappy thoughts. Before he covered half the distance to the depot, the policeman got himself an idea and hurried back to Point Penitentiary. Once there he requested a few words with the warden.

" About that man I just brought in, sir. Hap Streeter by name. I just wanted to tell you that he's a pretty sick man for a hard labour sentence. I wonder could you have the prison doctor check him over ? "

" Why, he is in the dispensary right now," answered the warden. " He requested medical attention before he even reached the cell-block we want to put him in, so our doctors are looking him over this very minute. If he is actually unfit for hard labour, you can be sure we'll give him some lighter duties instead."

" Thank you ; thank you very much ! " Chief David said, the start of a smile on his mouth again. He whistled all the way back to the station, chuckling now and then about Hap's shrewdness. When he got back to Willowdale, the policeman told us that Streeter had finally figured out something.

At Point Penitentiary Hap had his tonsils removed, also his appendix, while that painful and bothersome rupture was all mended properly. Hap spent two and a half months of his jail term resting comfortably in the prison hospital. The final two weeks of his sentence they cancelled as a reward for good behaviour. How else could a man behave when flat on his back in a hospital bed ?

He was a brand new man when he returned to Willowdale. Hap was pale and still weak, of course,

but there was a sparkle in his eyes again and no forced look about his smile.

" I'm patched up better'n new," he told us. " Why, they even took away an abscessed tooth that's been fretting me for a spell. I feel a hundred and ten per cent better, maybe more. Say, fellas— If Baldy and some of you boys were to show up at Corby's place to-night, I just might happen along with a jug o' cranberry juice and I'd admire to tell you all about my operations. Mind, I cain't do no braggin' about the pretty nurses, 'cause they use men-folks there in that prison hospital."

Next day, when Doctor Bill Gray met Hap on the main street, the old reprobate tipped a wink at the smiling medico and said :

" Y'know, Doc, there's something to be said for this here state medicine ! "

IX

Polly at the Fair

THE sad-looking judges glanced briefly at Ray Younger's sow. Haskell, the chief judge, paused long enough to mention that Ray's pig looked like she was ready to farrow. Then they went over to the scrubbed Tamworths featured by the Pinehill Piggery owned by Dan Marks himself.

This was on the first afternoon of Willowdale's three-day agricultural fair. Rain drummed steadily on the barn roof and made a sodden mess of the fairgrounds. The expected crowds had stayed away in

crowds. Only fair-board officials, exhibitors, and judges were present, and only because they had to be. Flash Carson, owner of Happyland Carnival, tagged along behind Dan Marks, President of the Fair. Flash kept asking where were all the people at, huh ?

" Shaddap ! " growled the choleric Dan, then nodded at Younger and gruffly enquired : " How'r'you, Ray ? "

" Just fine," Ray admitted gloomily. " Where's Lucy ? "

" Hmmffff ! " snorted the president. " My fancy-faced daughter stayed home, like all the rest of the people who should be here right now. We had to cancel the grandstand show, drat it."

He and Ray leaned on the pen railings and stared morosely at the huge Yorkshire sow, called Polly.

" She's going to farrow," Dan prophesied. He knew pigs, having operated the prosperous Pinehill Piggery for thirty years.

" Yeah," agreed Ray.

Dan Marks glanced at the unhappy young man and demanded : " 'S Lucy still mad at you ? "

" She sure is."

" She got any reason, this time ? "

" Only that she doesn't like pigs."

" How's that, again ? "

" Well, she said she grew up with pigs at your piggery and she's everlastingly sick of pigs, pigs, pigs. So she won't marry me while I have Polly. Also, she wants to go in for pedigreed poultry, while I favour geese myself. Did you know that they're making

powder puffs out of down-covered goose skin nowadays, for sale to the luxury trade ? "

" Hmmfffff ? "

" It's a fact ! Besides, I've lined up three city restaurants for so many geese per year, plus eighty cents per pound for the feathers and the local and district market for table birds at Christmas and other holiday times. I'd also sell breeding stock. I've got it all figured out."

" 'S nice," murmured Dan. " Ray, I wish you and Lucy would quit squabbling long enough to get married."

" Well, we can't on account of pigs. That, and Lucy wanting chickens instead of geese. Maybe it's a silly thing to fight about, but seems like we can quarrel over anything."

" So I notice. Hmmffff ! Isn't Polly here your only pig ? "

" Uh-huh. But Polly is the biggest pig in the district, and Lucy refuses to marry me while I've got this sow."

" My own daughter, not liking pigs ! If I had the nerve, I'd spank her." Then Dan appraised Polly with his best pork-judging gaze. " Didn't win any prize, eh ? Just a grade Yorkshire. Tell you what, Ray ; I'll give you seventy-five dollars for Polly, then you'll be clear of pigs and Lucy won't have any reason for fighting."

" She'll think up another reason." Ray sounded glum. " The chief thing that's wrong is that she's tired of waiting. I just finished paying for the farm ;

now I've got to earn a stake to get started in geese. Or poultry. This time, Lucy gave me back the engagement ring and she's letting Inky Summers take her to the dance on Saturday night."

He regarded his sow thoughtfully and added: "Polly's worth more than seventy-five dollars, and you know it."

"Not to me she isn't; I'm a Tamworth man."

"Well, I don't want to sell her anyway. She's a friendly sort of pig, useful for eating whatever I cook out there in my batching kitchen that I can't stomach myself. Besides, Lucy can't have her own way all the time. I'm willing to let her go in for chickens if she wants to, but she's got to let me keep geese. And Polly."

"You got a point there," Dan nodded, man to man.

Flash Carson tugged at the president's sleeve once more and wanted to know if there was no hope of getting any kind of crowd, huh? It cost money to run a carnival, Flash said. Dan said they might as well face it that nobody was going to make any money out of Willowdale's fair this year. Then he glanced again at Polly, muttered something about farrowing, and went across to the Pinehill Piggery exhibit where Haskell and the other judges were handing out a large assortment of prize ribbons.

Ray strolled to the pop-vending booth at the front of the barn and got himself a drink. At the door he stared out at the wetness that looked as if it would continue its deluge for the total duration of the Willowdale Fair. He had exhibited Polly to please Lucy, just

because her father was the fair's president. Now Lucy didn't like pigs and would not even speak to him, let alone agree to marry him and settle down to a happy life of tending geese. Or chickens. Or both.

"Looks like we're rained out, eh?" Inky Summers remarked in his original way. "About the only event that'll still be successful is the Fair Dance on Saturday. You going, Ray?"

"No. Some fellow stole my girl."

"So I did," nodded the unabashed Inky. "That Lucy! What a looker! I certainly admire our taste in women, Ray. But right now I'm after copy; you know anything newsy I can write up for the Willowdale Press?"

"Only an item for your Blessed Event column—my sow's going to farrow."

"Not unique enough, but let's have a look at her, anyway."

They walked back to Polly's pen. During the short interval while Ray had been away, the sow had been busy.

"Quite a mess of piglets," Inky commented.

Ray Younger took one look, then leaped into the pen. For the first time since his quarrel with Lucy he became positively cheerful.

"Five, ten, fifteen, twenty——" he counted, then suddenly yelled. "Hey, Dan! Dan Marks!" He shouted across the barn. "Dan, what's the largest pig-litter you ever heard about?"

"Twenty-three," answered Dan.

"Say, there're more than twenty-three here!" Inky Summers perked up, his newsy nose quivering. "How many do you make it, Ray?"

"An even forty," answered that delighted young man, who was fondling Polly's ears. "Nice going, old girl. I think you hit some kind of a jack-pot."

"Forty what?" asked Dan, coming over for a look. "HmmfffFFFF! HEY! HASKELL! JONES! SMETHURST! EVERYBODY!! FORTY PIGS IN A SINGLE LITTER!!!"

Haskell took one pop-eyed look and declared it was utterly impossible. Jones and Smethurst agreed with him. Ray Younger merely smiled and waved his hand at the proof. Dan Marks climbed into the pen, counted the piglets, climbed out, then scrambled back and re-counted. Next he straddled the fence and yelled for his workers.

"Get nursing bottles—dozens of bottles. Mix the milk! Hurry up! Polly can't possibly feed this—this convention. If we save 'em, it'll be a world record. Get going!"

"World record?" muttered Haskell. He and Jones and Smethurst whispered together for a moment, then surreptitiously attached a Grand Championship ribbon to Polly's pen.

Inky Summers scribbled hastily before scooting away and yelling about getting it in the weekly's headlines. He added that the city dailies would also want to hear about this wonderful freak.

"Freak?" Flash Carson looked alert. "Maybe it'd work. A banner on a tent, big letters sayin'

'Polly and her Forty Pigs'! Look, boy; you own all this, doncha? I'll pay you fifty bucks for the whole collection, mother and family. Whaddayuh say, huh?"

Dan Marks shouldered the sideshow man out of the way and yelled:

"I'll buy her, Ray. I'll pay a couple hundred, cash!"

"I'll raise that by fifty," cried Haskell. "You may have a special large-litter strain— Ray, I'll give you three hundred dollars!"

"Four hundred!" said Jones and Smethurst simultaneously.

"Five hundred!" bellowed Dan Marks.

"Five hun— Hey, that's more'n I paid for a whole lion!" marvelled Flash Carson, letting his cigar go out. "Look, kiddo. Maybe we could make some kinda rental deal, huh? Whaddayuh say?"

"Calm down, men," said Ray. "Polly's not for sale."

Exhibitors and judges from the cattle, horse, and sheep barns got news of Polly's phenomenon and came running to see. Rumours reached the soggy Happyland Carnival tents and from them came Carson's crew, including the World's Tallest Man, Fattest Lady in the Universe, and the Hairy Man from Chi-chicastinango.

"Le's see!"

"Move over!"

"Quit shovin'!"

" Gimme a look, will yuh ? "

The *Willowdale Press* appeared at four o'clock that afternoon. Half an hour later people were on their way to the fair grounds garbed in slickers and raincoats and holding umbrellas. They paid their admission to the grounds, but they did not pause at Happyland's tents nor look into the Industrial Building's commercial booths or at the Home Arts exhibit of home cooking and fancy work. They headed straight for the pig barn, everyone eager to see Polly and her Forty Pigs. The little grunters were just about the smallest piglets ever seen, but every last one looked healthy and happy in a sleepy sort of way as they guzzled milk from bottles and other things. Polly herself grunted with contentment, apparently none the worse for her terrific bout of motherhood.

In no time at all the Pig Barn was jam-packed with people. Dan Marks called for help from the Fair Board and judges. They shooed back the crowd while a work crew built a special fence across the barn floor so that people could file past Polly's pen in orderly rows and safely view the abundant life.

" Lemme bring in a ticket-seller, huh ? " pleaded Flash Carson. " Look-ut all them cash customers, not paying a nickel, a dime, or even a quarter of a buck. Hey, boy ; le's move Polly to a carny tent, huh ? I'll give you full expenses and ten per cent. Net, that is. Whaddayuh say, huh ? "

" Ten per cent ! " scoffed Dan Marks. " Ray, I'll pay a thousand dollars for her right now ! "

" So will I," yelled Haskell.

"Me, too," said Jones and Smethurst together.

Ray shook his head, suddenly looking glum again.

"I just thought of something, Dan. Lucy'll be pretty sore about all this. I mean, she's got forty more reasons for her anti-pig quarrel."

"Lucy? Hmmffff! You're absolutely right, Ray. Better let me take the whole works off your hands for eleven hundred, cash."

Ray refused to sell. However, a calculating gleam started glinting in his eyes. He began to review, in his mind, the capital required to get a good start in geese; the cost of breeding stock, special fencing required, finishing pens, and a processing building complete with cold-storage plant. He looked at the crowd; people were thronging to see Polly and her family. Evening editions of two city dailies had reached town by this time, and both gave the Sow Story a front-page spread. Inky Summers had returned and mentioned that a couple of city radio stations were going to broadcast Polly's prodigious doings over their evening news-cast, and a TV camera-man was coming to Willowdale to photograph the pigs. Ray heard the Fair Board directors telling President Marks, in gleeful tones, that the ticket-sellers at the entrance gate were swamped with business and needed extra help. The pig barn was continually crowded, and the eager people were lined up in the rain beyond the building.

As Ray did his scheming, a stout man behind a large cigar offered him a pudgy hand and a gold-toothed smile.

"I'm Gorki," he said. "Gorki of Mammoth Shows."

"Get outta here, you chiseller!" screamed Flash Carson. "You stay on your circuit and leave Willowdale to Happyland! That's the deal, all signed and sealed, huh? Whaddayuh say, huh?"

"I didn't bring my show, Flash. I just came here to see this fine young fella here, owner of these pigs. Look, fella; Polly would be a sensation on the farm circuit, and Mammoth Shows is booked solid to tour that circuit all summer and fall. Name your price and I'll pay up."

"No! No! He's mine! I offered him percentage and everything! Go back to Mammoth and stay there!"

"You sideshow men keep out of this," Dan Marks shouted. "This is no freak, but a swine-breeder's triumph! Ray, pay no attention to these carnival men— I'll give you twelve hundred dollars right this minute for the whole she-bang."

Ray said, as he glanced pleasantly at both Gorki and Carson:

"I'm rather curious about how much money I'd make, say, if we really did put Polly in a tent and sold tickets?"

Flash and Gorki began to dance and scream, trying to pat Ray on the back and punch each other all at the same time. Dan Marks and Haskell, Jones and Smethurst looked flabbergasted over Ray's announcement. The Fair Board held a sudden huddle in midfloor, glancing at both the crowd and at Ray Younger.

The prospective goose-farmer would not agree to anything that Carson and Gorki offered, though he disagreed in such a way as to leave negotiations in a state of flux. By this time the evening had darkened into full night and rain was falling heavier than ever. It was time to close the barn, but as yet there were still throngs of people lined up to look at Polly and her Pigs.

Dan Marks did some talking after the doors finally closed behind the last curious spectator.

" Ray, my boy," said Dan, and his voice was smoothed down and almost emotional. " Ray, I've always looked upon you as a sort of son, and I know that you wouldn't do anything to change my affection for you. After all, Lucy is my daughter, and— Well, she's my daughter, as I say. Hmmfffff ! Now listen to me, Ray ; you wouldn't let Gorki take Polly away from Willowdale, would you ? "

" What's the weather forecast, Inky ? " Ray asked.

" Continued rain, the papers say. So does the radio. No let-up in sight."

" Hah ! " Ray smiled at Dan and the Fair Board. " That means the fair will be rained out to-morrow, unless——"

" Unless what ? " quavered the directors.

" Unless Polly and her forty piglets stay here."

Gorki said :

" But listen ! Over at Vicksburg where Mammoth is set up, there're more people. Especially farm kind of people. They'll come for miles to see Polly—they'd even come all the way from Willowdale to Vicksburg

to see her and the forty. Look, fella : I'll raise that percentage I mentioned."

" He's mine ! " screeched Flash. " I discovered him ! I'll give a cash bonus, plus percentage ! "

Ray glanced meaningly at the Fair Board. Dan Marks and the directors went into another huddle, this time with all the pig judges called in as special consultants. Meanwhile Inky Summers took a number of flash pictures of Polly and Family.

" Why the pics ? " asked Ray.

" The dailies in the cities ordered them," Inky explained. " It's what we reporters call human-interest stuff."

" So I noticed when the crowd was here," Ray nodded, and he called across to the huddlers : " Inky tells me that the papers will be publishing pictures of Polly's pigs. I'm just wondering if he should say we'll be here in Willowdale, or perhaps over at Vicksburg with Gorki's shows."

Flash Carson begged and Gorki wheedled. Dan and the directors re-checked figures on gate tickets sold, which exceeded all previous Willowdale records despite the rain. Then they advanced on Ray in a body and announced that they were ready to discuss terms.

" The Fair Board is prepared to pay you seventeen hundred and fifty dollars for Polly and her family," said Dan. " Now, you're a local boy, Ray, and I'm sure you'll want to do the honourable thing by dear old Willowdale and all your friends here."

" Polly's not for sale, as I told you before. Besides, I've been doing a little figuring on what it'll cost me to get started in geese and maybe chickens, like I discussed with you earlier, Dan. Just in case Lucy changes her mind and we can make a compromise. And also supposing that Inky Summers here is willing to give up his date with Lucy for the Fair Dance."

" I give her up here and now," nodded Inky. " She only wanted to make you jealous."

" She needles me that way all the time ; maybe it proves what I think it proves. Anyway, I've got it doped out that I'll need a lot more'n seventeen hundred and fifty dollars for a good start in geese and chickens, besides the cost of gettin' married and maybe having a honeymoon."

" Providing Lucy will have you," interjected Inky.

" Shaddap ! " growled Dan Marks. " Of course she'll have him ! I'll— Well, I'll— Hmmmfffff ! Never mind Lucy. Get to the point, Ray. What about Polly ? "

" She's not for sale. I like Polly, and I need at least one pig on the farm to prove my point, such as a certain party not getting her own way too much."

" Yes, yes ! " snapped Dan. " I mean, I agree in full— Though if you just want to keep Polly in the family, sort of, I'd be glad to buy her from you myself."

" Now, Marks," protested Haskell. " You agreed to negotiate for the Fair Board and not for Pinehill Piggery."

" My proposition's the best offer he's had yet,"

Gorki declared. " Mammoth Show'd do the right thing by Polly."

" No ! Happyland is here now ! All we gotta do is put a ticket-seller at this barn door and we're in business. Whaddayuh say, huh ? "

" Seems to me the Fair Board has been in that kind of business ever since Polly hatched her batch," said Ray. " That's why I think it would be nice, sort of, for the directors to show their appreciation for Polly pulling their fair out of a rained-out flop by paying me ten per cent of to-day's gate receipts."

" Ten per cent ! " howled Dan Marks. " We took in more'n three thousand— That'd mean three hundred dollars for doing nothing ! "

" You forget that I own Polly," Ray reminded him.

" Hmmffff ! So you do, blast it ! " Dan gathered the Board around him again, and the huddled gentlemen quickly nodded their heads in unison. So Marks straightened up and said : " We'll pay you the money, you young pirate."

" Thanks a lot," beamed Ray. " In addition to ten per cent for to-day, I'll require ten per cent of to-morrow's and next day's receipts, because all this newspaper and radio publicity about Polly is going to bring more people to your fair."

" It's robbery ! " yelled Dan.

" It's also raining. Don't forget the weather forecast, which says that the rain will continue."

" Hmmffff ! " snorted Dan. He and the Fair Board huddled again briefly, then the president said : " The

directors and myself find that we've got no alternative but to agree to your terms, so we agree, doggone it ! "

" Thank you," smiled Ray. " Now, in addition to that ten per cent, Inky and me have just doped out a sideline proposition. Inky is going to make copies of his pictures of Polly's Pigs, and we want your permission to sell those pictures here to-morrow, at twenty-five cents each, to anybody who's craz— who wants to buy them, that is."

" Sure," agreed the Fair Board, without huddling. " Go ahead. It's no skin off our noses."

But Dan Marks added, cautiously :

" Hmmmfffffff ! Is there anything else you had in mind, Ray ? "

" Well, now that you mention it, there *is* one other little item. You and Mr. Haskell and Jones and Smethurst are all good pig men, so you know that Polly's pigs may turn out to be well conditioned to produce large litters when they grow up. Polly herself is not for sale, but I'm willing to accept orders for Polly's piglets. I figure they're worth one hundred dollars a-piece."

" A hundred dollars ! " howled Dan. " It's a blasted hold-up ! Hmmmfffff ! I'll take five."

" I'll also take five," Haskell said quickly.

" So will we," added Jones and Smethurst.

" Thank you," said Ray. " That's twenty of Polly's litter sold, and perhaps some of the visiting swine men will be interested in the other twenty, to-morrow. Let's see— I'll give delivery in a month, if all goes well. That'll be four thousand dollars from Polly's forty

pigs, and three hundred for to-day's share of the gate, and maybe the same or more to-morrow and next day. Inky believes we'll clear five hundred a-piece on the pictures— Say, Dan ; I wonder if Lucy would be interested in hearing about my goose and chicken raising plans to-night, late and all as it is ? "

" I wouldn't be surprised," growled Dan Marks. " I certainly wouldn't be at all surprised. Hmmffff ! "

" Only thing is, she's got to agree to let me keep Polly."

Lucy agreed.

X

The Dark-eyed Doe

THERE is a wild ravine on the far side of Blackbird Lake, north-east of the town limits. To reach the ravine, one has to penetrate some dense underbrush and go beyond the creeklet which trickles down the draw. Alders and willows crowd each other on the stream banks on the flats near the lake, while thickets of saskatoon and chokecherries thrive on the slopes above. Then the shrubs give way to forest growth, where spruces reach high to get their share of sunshine. White birches and smooth-barked poplars are scattered among the evergreens. In fact, the whole ravine area looks like an untidy but very beautiful park. It was there that the blind deer had her home.

A few deer have always lived in the woodlands near the pond, as it is the last large wooded area close to Willowdale. The wasteland totals more than two hundred acres of forested slopes and valleys, centred by the pond with its summer coating of yellow water-lilies. Jonathon Gates has farm fields on the uplands nearby, but he always saved the trees around Blackbird Lake. The deadfalls provide him with a perpetual supply of firewood, while he likes the idea of preserving the wilderness as a small sanctuary for game and birds. He was delighted that a few deer stayed there, and to one doe a blind fawn was born.

How the little creature survived is a mystery. Coyotes howl every night from the hills above the pond ; some say that these wild dogs are not above seeking out the hidden bed of a weak fawn. Once a black bear was sighted among the berry bushes next the Lake, while Mr. Gates himself has heard the yowling scream of a Canada Lynx from the woodlands. Yet despite all these wild hunters, the blind fawn grew to adult size and was finally deserted by its mother. Then the sightless deer chose a range in the park-like ravine.

Willowdale's game warden, Don Cully, was the first to discover her affliction. Don roused the doe from a thicket one day. She turned directly towards him for a couple of jumps before going carefully around a massive tree and heading into the screening alders.

" She didn't scoot straight away like you'd expect, and that made me wonder. Mind, I had no idea

right then that she was blind. At the time it just seemed to me that she was following a trail I couldn't see."

The next time Cully glimpsed her, she had her ears flagged towards him and was half hidden behind some saskatoons. Don stalked fairly close, then used binoculars to get a better look at her and the magnification gave him a chance to see the film covering her eyes. When he went closer still she became uneasy and moved. Don saw how cautiously she turned, feeling her way through the shrubbery before bounding down the slope in a zig-zag course that missed all trees, deadfalls, and other obstructions.

"I'm positive that she's got a system of trails all through her home territory. Maybe her sense of smell helps her to identify those paths, but my own guess is that she's memorized the routes by the feel of ground contours or the touch of twigs at certain places which guide her along the proper trail. It was marvellous to watch her, totally blind and yet going so swiftly down that slope to reach the thickets near the creek."

Once in the willows she moved like a shadow and was soon beyond the warden's view. He made a habit of visiting Blackbird Lake and its surroundings quite often from then on, just for the pleasure of watching her.

"I tell you, fellows ; there's something real special about her. She has more grace than any ordinary deer, because there's a poise about her that is lovely to see."

Cully didn't tell many about her, of course. Don is no fool, and he is always close-mouthed when hunters try to get information from him about the best deer ranges in our Willowdale outlands. The warden is not mean about such matters, but it is his job to protect and conserve the diminishing game of our district. Hence Don Cully told only a few good friends about that blind doe. He mentioned her to Jonathon Gates, the land-owner, also to Tom David, the policeman. Once the warden guided in the Reverend Tanner to show him the deer, because Cully knew that the minister would sense the proud independence of that blind animal and would fully appreciate the pathetic yet beautiful quality of her affliction. The warden also took in Maryellen Haskell, who painted a fine picture of the deer posed among the shining birches.

Naturally, Don made no mention of the doe to men like Warty Sloane. There are trashy people in every community, and the warden knew well enough that Sloane bragged of his fondness for venison poached out of season.

Yet it was impossible to hush all talk of such an oddity. Before long most of the townsfolk and nearby farmers had heard about the blind beauty of Blackbird Lake. A few went blundering in there to get a look, but she was much too secretive for most of them. Young Morton, the minister's boy, tried to stalk the doe by woodcraft methods he'd learned at boy scout meetings. He didn't see her after more than an hour's searching, so Morton gave up the quest. Then, boy-like, he pushed over a large stump that had an

ant-riddled and rotten base. The crash of this tree falling to earth was terrifically loud, and the noise startled the deer from her hiding-place. Morton described how she came bounding up the slope towards him and carefully following one of her invisible pathways. That stump had fallen directly across her trail, and she smashed into it and fell. For a moment she was completely still with shock, then she struggled onto her feet again and stood trembling, undecided about what to do. Next the doe slowly felt her way all around the stump until she reached the familiar path once more, then went swiftly on into the spruces and out of sight.

"That ole stump was sure heavy," Morton related. "It was all I could do to move it, but I used a pry and I finally shifted it alongside another fallen log. I left it there, so's it would be out of the blind deer's way when she came along there again."

Don Cully told us that the doe did not forget the tumble. From then on she made a careful half-circle around the vacant place where the stump had been lying when she hit it.

"I don't mind admitting that it brought a lump into my throat, seeing her do that and thinking of the slow and painful way she must have learned each of her trails through that ravine."

The warden described how she fed on birch browse and willow twigs; how she went to a favourite meadow and knelt, deer-fashion, to graze on clover leaves. She had a special path to a drinking-pool, a spring-fed cup at the edge of the creeklet. Her morning

bed was usually up in the high part of the ravine on a knoll screened by chokecherry bushes. At evening she liked to forage in the lowlands next the lake and bed down among the alders in one of the thickest tangles of the region.

" Coyotes won't bother her at all, now that she's full-grown," Don said. " Besides, coyotes have lots of mice and rabbits to feed on these days. Larger predators like cougar and wolves seldom venture this close to town, so I believe she'll be safe from all harm."

She thrived there on the far side of Blackbird Lake until autumn came. That's the time when stately bucks go questing for consorts, and Don Cully found larger tracks along the creek to indicate that the blind doe had a mate. The game warden patrolled the area a great deal after the first snowfall, when deer hunters were abroad in numbers. But all the sportsmen, like Frew and Pete Popovitch and others, by some unspoken agreement among themselves stayed away from the Jonathon Gates lands to avoid frightening that beautiful, sightless animal.

When winter ended and Hermit Thrushes had returned to the ravine, the doe had her fawn in a hidden part of the willow thickets. Cully reported that he'd never seen such a devoted mother. She taught her little one all the special secrets of caution, all the wary tricks of testing the breeze for scent of enemies and listening for warnings of danger : the chirring scold of a squirrel, the three-note call of crows,

the shrill alarms of bluejays and kakking of magpies, and the meaningful slap of a beaver's tail on the quiet waters of the lake.

"It's a young stag," Don told us. "He's a little beauty, too. I saw them at the spring pool this morning, and the wee one was nursing while the mother stood patient and proud. I wish Maryellen could have seen it and painted us a picture of that scene."

As summer advanced the young fawn was no longer left in a hidden retreat, but began following the blind mother through the woodlands on her feeding jaunts. A few berry-pickers sighted the doe and her sturdy youngster; in fact, the animals were nibbling on purple-ripe saskatoons at the time. Miss Hagen's class of Grade Five students, out on a September flower-gathering expedition during the first week of school, came excitedly back to town to tell of getting a good close look at the beautiful doe and her half-grown fawn.

Yes; by this time everyone around Willowdale knew about that blind deer at Blackbird Lake. Warty Sloane had heard of her, and had slipped furtively out there a few times when he knew the game warden was busy elsewhere. Sloane had a sly craft that his illegal activities made necessary, hence it was easy for him to stalk the doe and learn something about her habits and routine. He thought up a plan to get her, though he waited until frosts became sharp to put the venison in prime condition. Then Sloane went out to Blackbird Lake early one morning. Once at the ravine, he looped some cabled wire down from a

tough birch branch under which the doe passed on her way to the spring pool. The poacher had chosen a snare in preference to a rifle, because he knew that shot noise might bring the warden on the run.

But by chance Don Cully was in that ravine, at the very moment when Sloane was reaching a knife towards the throat of the poor blind doe who was frantically jerking against the relentless noose. The game warden charged across the clearing, yelling at Sloane to drop the knife. Warty Sloane did drop it, too, and sprinted away before Cully could reach him. Don didn't bother to chase the poacher. Instead, he snatched up the heavy knife and quickly sliced through the copper wire to release the gasping doe.

She whirled away with her frightened fawn at her side. The death-struggle had numbed the doe's instincts and the deer didn't follow one of her familiar trails at that moment. She bounded heedlessly over the rough ground, grazing past one large tree and crashing headlong through a grove of sapling poplars. Beyond the poplars the fawn dug in its tiny hooves and skidded to a stop as he bleated a wild alarm. Instantly the doe whirled and went to her little one.

Her quick devotion saved her life. One more bound, and she would have gone over a sheer cliff to crash on the jagged creek rocks below. But now, nuzzling her fawn she stood quiet until the panic of the murderous episode had passed.

" She's not hurt," Cully assured us. " I watched her feel her way back to a trail, then they went loping off together into the chokecherries to seek a day-bed.

We haven't lost our blind beauty, and from now on everyone of you can help guard her."

As for Warty Sloane, he moved out of Willowdale after he paid the heavy fine that Judge Benn imposed on him. At that trial Sloane must have finally sensed that there are forms of blindness that decent folk just won't tolerate.

XI

The Wooing Girl

WHEN Ad Harder's mother sickened, he brought Martha Betts from a city orphan home to nurse the old lady on her death-bed. Ma Harder became interested in bossing around the shy girl, so the old lady put off dying for eleven years.

Ad mourned for three days like a dutiful son, then rushed to finish spring seeding. During her long stay at the Harder home, Martha had studied him closely and finally realized that she loved him dearly. She kept on at the house-keeping work, with Ad coming big and black-bearded to eat the meals and hustle back to work. The Harders always worked hard, which helped to explain Ad's standing as the best farmer in the valley.

For a month Martha kept patiently quiet, then one morning at breakfast-time she opened her campaign.

"Mister Ad, you want I should keep on working here?"

"Yep," Ad nodded between swallows of coffee. "Ma taught you her way o' tending house, so you suit me fine."

"All right," agreed Martha. "But what about pay?"

"Why, I'll pay the same as Ma did," he said. "What'd she give you?"

"Not a red cent! She figgered it enough to feed me and give me these hand-down clothes, but I've been looking at the law and I want my rights."

"Law?" Add was startled by the word.

"If I go before Judge Benn, I can make you pay me going wages ever since I was twenty-one, which was seven full years back. House-keepers in these parts are getting sixty dollars a month; some more and some less. At sixty dollars a month for seven years, you owe me five thousand and forty dollars."

"Five thousand an' forty cash-dollars!!!!!"

"That's right, Mister Ad."

The man stared at the shadowy girl who had run his home so efficiently for eleven years, but he wasn't impressed by what he saw.

"You wouldn't dast go to court," he scoffed.

"Wouldn't I?" Martha's eyes sparkled with spirit. "I spoke my piece to Reverend Greenfield, him that buried your Ma, and he figgered it all out for

me and said he'd stand up as witness if I go before Judge Benn."

That jolted Ad. Everybody knew the rural parson ; Doxology Greenfield had a bald head with white hairs bristling from his ears and a pair of kind blue eyes. The Reverend had never made a success of farming as a sideline to gospel, but there was no doubt that Doxology was headman of the district in all moral matters. Ad saw that he was properly called to order.

" Your Ma told me that you had eight thousand dollars in the bank," Martha mentioned.

" I spent it. I got me a new tractor and guv'ment seed and a regist'ed bull. Right now, I got but two thousand two hundred dollars to my name."

" Well, I'll take it on account. Write me a cheque and I'll give you a re-ceet. Doxology told me exactly what to do."

" But look," Ad pleaded. " I need the money."

" So do I."

" What for ? "

" To buy a new dress. 'Tain't fitten that the housekeeper of the valley's best farmer should be gowned in cast-offs."

" Frivol stuff ! " hollered Ad. " I've a mind to fire you."

" Do that, and I'll sue for the full five thousand and forty dollars in cash ! "

" Aw, listen to reason— It'd crimp me painful ! "

Martha fought up her nerve and finally blurted :

" If you marry me, Mister Ad, I'll forget about the debt."

"Whatttttttt?"

"Well, folks is gonna talk, me a girl o' twenty-eight and you a man pushin' thirty-six, living here unchaperoned anymore by your late Ma. If you marry me, it'll cancel out the money."

Ad sat down. He stood up. Red showed through his mat of black whiskers. Then he started roaring. The gist of his blast was that he would *not* marry Martha Betts, and what in Babel did she take him for, anyhow?

"You're a man, ain't you?" Martha became impish, now that the tune was called. "Besides, I happen to love you!"

"You shameless, scrawny——"

"Stop right there!" cried Martha, also getting red. "Your Ma's dresses don't fit, is all. No matter how I sew, them cast-offs never look good. But I'm not scrawny! If you won't marry me, give me my money and I'll scat."

Ad looked stricken to the core.

"You can mor'gage the farm and pay in full," Martha said. "That way, I'll go. Otherwise I'll take two thousand two hundred dollars in cash and keep on working for wages until you can pay the balance. Or marry me and make me a true lovin' husband. You got a choice."

Ad sat and moped. Martha washed dishes, swept floors, set carrots to cooking. Ad peeked at the raggy girl; what he saw made him spoof the wedding idea. But he hated mortgages, hence he had but one alternative left. Finally he filled out a cheque for two thousand

two hundred dollars and made a sour face as he passed it over.

"You sure ain't welcome," he grumbled.

"The law also d'clares," smiled Martha, "that workin' folks is entitled to holidays. I ain't had none as yet, so I'll start by takin' this afternoon off and go buy me some pretties."

Next morning the man dozed past getting-up time, because he had fussed over his new worries for half the night. Martha had come home late and fretted him worse by thumping parcels around downstairs. Ad slept in and woke with a start, a strange sound in his ears. He scowled when he realized that the girl was singing; in addition to this she wished him a pleasant good morning when he stomped downstairs.

"Gaaaaaa!" said Ad, by way of squelching such nonsense.

"Like it?" Martha demanded, touching her hair. It was curled cute and shone golden in the morning light. Ad jerked his eyes away and strode out to tend livestock. By the time she whanged the breakfast gong he had thought up some sneery words.

"I see you still got Ma's old clothes on, anyways. Maybe you learned that pretties cost money, heh?"

"They sure do! Cost me over three hundred dollars, and I barely got started."

Ad spluttered on his hot mush, gagging to think of cash going to waste. He muttered that a fool and two thousand two hundred dollars would soon part company.

At hot noontime he came from work to find Martha cool and pretty in a gay new dress. The dress fitted properly and proved the girl's contention that she was not scrawny. Martha was burning the coarse black stockings Ma Herder considered proper gear, and Ad couldn't help notice the girl's legs were sheathed in sheer stockings and looked amazingly shapely.

"Gimme my dinner!" he gruffly ordered.

"Yes, Mister Ad."

She meekly dished a plate of fried chicken.

"Chicken! Girl, you know dang well we don't eat chicken 'cepting Thanks-give time and Christmas!"

Out of the warming oven Martha fetched another dish loaded with pickled pork that Ad had salted too strong.

"Here you are, then." She moved the offending plate to her end of the table. "And don't blow a button, 'cause I bought this chicken in Willowdale with my own money. I felt chicken hungry and thought maybe you did too, but you're welcome to that brine-smellin' stuff if you like it."

Ad did not enjoy his dinner. Afterwards he tromped to the door and hesitated on the porch, trying to think up something nasty to say. Martha came to the screen door behind him and watched bees swirl around the flowers she had planted. She offered the opinion that it was a nice day to get married, whereupon the angry farmer stamped off to work.

When the supper gong brought him back to the house, the man stared in amazement at the transformed kitchen. Bright linoleum was on the floor, red-

checkered cloth graced the table with matching cushions on the chairs, while the faded old window curtains had been replaced with sassy new ones and even the flower pots had gay coverings. Martha had on another new dress, too, which made her look even prettier than ever.

" You like the sparkin's, Mister Ad ? "

He was completely speechless.

The girl said, soothingly :

" Don't bust out mad. I saved all the old stuff, and I'll put it back in place to-morrow if you say so."

Ad soaped himself slow at the wash-basin, thinking of the sombre fittings that hadn't been bright since the far-away time of his Ma's wedding day.

" Leave 'em lay," he finally muttered. " Ain't worth fussin', to change."

" Thank you," said Martha, very sweetly. " Since you ask it as a special favour, I'll leave the fixings until I go. Then I'll take 'em with me, 'cause I used my money to buy them."

Ad pondered while munching, with no comment, fried chicken and hot biscuits.

" I'll pay for 'em," he offered. " The windows needed new curtains anyways. So I'll pay if you leave the sparkin's."

" Be glad to," Martha smirked. " 'Course, if you married me— Oh, all right ! Only, hurry up with your supper, 'cause I'm going out."

" Where to ? "

" Being no consarn of yours, I wouldn't care to say."

Ad dallied over whipped prunes, so Martha tidied

the rest and left him supping while she went to her back room. Ad pretended to read a seed-list, but the girl did not hustle her primping and finally the man could no longer ignore the bawling cows. Martha was gone when he returned from the barn.

Half-way down the stairs next morning, Ad stopped and sniffed.

" What smells ? "

" Me." Martha sounded cross. " I bought par-foom at Willowdale last night, but something went wrong."

" Something sure did ! "

" Well, maybe I shouldn't'a' used the whole bottle," she admitted. " But it was just a teeny one even if it did cost five dollars. It's called ' Marry-Me.' "

" I won't," Ad declared grimly, going out to chore.

When he returned for breakfast Martha had changed to an odourless dress and filled the kitchen with pancake smell. Her error had chastened her and she fussed to feed Ad properly.

" I went to a movie-picture at the Bijou las' night." The girl made conversation. " It was about a girl who wanted to marry her boss, but he kept dodging her off. Then she took after a travellin' salesman her boss didn't like, which riled him up. In one scene she wore a red bathin' suit ; I plan to get one o' them skimpy things too."

Ad devoted his attention to building a stack of pancakes well mortared with clover honey, but his curiosity goaded him to ask :

" How'd the boss-man make out ? "

" Oh, he punched the salesman, who was nasty-bad with girls, and at the end he saved her from going over a waterfall and kissed her real fond. Did you ever kiss a girl, Mister Ad ? "

" No ! "

Three times a day the girl asked Ad to marry her and the big man got hoarse from his roarings. The Harder home changed. Martha opened the parlour and refurnished it, sitting there in the evenings instead of back in the kitchen. Ad used it too, seeing no sense in wasting lights in two places. She lit the fireplace on chilly nights and popped corn over the coals and put gobs of salty butter on it. Ad helped eat it to prevent waste. She made pull-taffy, and he gave her a hand because nobody can manage pull-taffy alone. She bought ice-cream and other goodies at Willowdale, causing Ad to gain weight. Once he even caught himself whistling, but he kept saying No.

Midsummer arrived and it was community picnic-time. Harders never wasted time on such gaddings, so Martha went alone. However, she did not come home alone, for young Milt Fox fetched her back, even though it was four miles out of his way. Next evening Toller Jones from across the road called for Martha and they went joyriding when the moon was bright and night-stock was smelling lovely. A week later there was a dance at the school-house and both Milt and Toller called for Martha. She wore a yellow dress and her cheeks were flushed and her eyes looked starry because it was her very first dance. On Sunday

afternoon a hired man called Brady from Haskell's farm showed up with two saddle-horses. Martha wore green pants and went bouncing away, clutching happily at the horse's neck. Sunday night she was too sore to sit on a church pew alongside Toller, so they went over to the Jones' and visited. The girl went berry-picking with Milt but they didn't get much fruit, while the fish never bit good when she and Brady went a-bobbing at Willow Creek. Ad scowled almost continually these days, even though the harvest was heavy. To cheer him up Martha fetched a radio from town.

"We need music around here." She turned in a prancy rumba. "Can you dance, Mister Ad?"

"No."

"Then I'll learn you," she said, stepping into his arms.

He backed off hastily, yelling:

"I don't dance, I said!"

"Maybe you better learn, so's you can take me to shin-digs after we're married."

Ad yelled that she was a rattle-headed biddy despite her sassy pretties and when he said No he meant No.

"All right." She clicked off the radio, her mouth trembling. "Neither am I so keen on you as I was, now that I've met Toller and Milt and Brady. I enjoy being spoke to polite and maybe even praised once in a while, instead of continual growlings just because I don't fit exact into the Harder scheme o' things. I won't pester you again, Mister Ad. Now that harvest is over, deliver your grain and pay me

what's due and I'll go marry someone who wants me."

Ad felt queer ; perhaps it was because he was getting his own way once again. He loaded the big truck and drove to town. When he took in all his crop and went to the bank with elevator slips, the wicket man made new figures in his pass-book. He had more than enough to pay off Martha Betts.

With this joyful thought in mind, Ad got his beard shaved off at Baldy's barber shop. He bought new clothes and slicked up fancy. It was late when he reached home, and Martha had gone out. On the table there was jellied meat and cold slaw and pie-plant tart all ready for his supper. Ad ate, then finished his chores. He returned to the house and inspected himself in a mirror and reckoned that he looked younger than Toller Jones, which wasn't true.

While waiting, Ad got out a blue form and penned a cheque, two thousand eight hundred and forty dollars and no cents, payable to Martha Betts, housekeeping acc't in full, signed Ad Harder. He wished she would come home so that he could order her out. Martha didn't come. It was ten o'clock and Ad was tired. At half-past ten he was mad. At eleven he marched off to bed. When the half-hour struck he dressed and marched downstairs again. Twelve o'clock found him stretched fully dressed on top of the bed and wide awake, because the Jones' car had just stopped at the Harder gate.

Ad peered out. The harvest moon was golden full as Martha and Toller walked slowly up the path.

They stopped on the porch under his window, talking in whispers. Ad listened hard and heard a smacking sound. Then the latch rattled and Toller went whistling away.

Ad rushed downstairs. Martha screamed.

" You kissed him ! " he shouted.

Martha said: " Oh, it's only you—without whiskers ! "

" You kissed him ! " bellowed Ad.

Martha stared at him with new interest.

" You're almost handsome," she told him.

" You kissed Toller ! " thundered the man.

" No," said Martha. " You got it wrong. Toller kissed me."

" I'll bash his head ! " hollered Ad.

" Why ? "

" Because——" Ad stood stricken, trying to swallow his senseless rage. He towered tall, gathering up the shreds of his dignity. " Here ! " He shoved the cheque at her. " Take it and Git ! "

Martha read it slowly and her face became white. Tears ran from her eyes as she scuttled to her room.

Ad felt mean. His innards squished tight and wrung out an agony of remorse inside him. He went to her door and knocked gently on it.

" Don't go," he begged.

" Go away," cried Martha, clicking the lock.

It made him resentful that she did not trust him. He hammered on the oak panels and shouted that he wanted her to stay. Martha made no answer. Ad bellowed what he thought of her, which was plenty

and all of it good. She had made his home happy ; she'd filled his life with sparkle and he wanted to marry her and keep her with him forever.

" D'you hear ? " Ad boomed at full blast. " I LOVE YOU ! ! ! "

He banged fists on the door, demanding that she come out. The door remained closed. Ad kicked it. The door held. He rammed it with a muscular shoulder. It didn't budge. He got a running start down the hall and smacked the door with both feet in a turned-around tackle, whereupon the door flung him flat on his back. Ad got up and hollered his proposal again, but when he got no acknowledgment he became angry and withdrew his offer of marriage.

Finally he realized that there had been no stir from the girl for a long spell. Had she fainted from shock ? Panicked, Ad rushed outside and galloped around to her window. The window was wide open ; the room was empty.

" Toller Jones ! " yelped Ad. " She's gone off to e-lope with him ! "

He raced across the road and pounded on the Jones' door. Toller came. Ad banged him on the chin and knocked him flat. He set about choking some sense into a no-good who kissed girls at midnight, but Mrs. Maybelle Jones, Toller's Ma, grabbed onto Ad's hair and leaned her two hundred and sixty-four pounds the other way. Ad let loose of Toller and discovered that Martha wasn't there."

" Milt Fox ! " he decided.

Ad rushed for his truck and sped to the darkened

Fox home. Ad banged on the door. When nothing happened, he kicked the portal open and roared out his uncomplimentary opinion of the Foxes. Milt jumped him from behind and they wrestled. Milt bit and clawed and booted, but Ad threw him into a water-trough and fought off the whole Fox family long enough to learn that Martha wasn't there.

Now he knew his quarry for sure. It was Brady, the hired man at Haskell's farm. Ad got there as dawn broke. Haskell had a bunk-house and Brady was in it. Brady knew quite a lot about boxing and hit Ad with lefts and rights and uppercuts and managed to knock him down four times. But Ad finally got hold of Brady, whereupon Brady scratched and bit and kicked even worse than Milt Fox. Ad kept on pounding until Brady was licked, then the attacker asked what he wanted to know and Brady gave him the answer. Martha wasn't there.

There being no place else to go, Ad went home. He washed off the blood and put butter on the bumps. Worse than the wounds, he was sick at heart and sore of soul. He pined for Martha.

He went out to do morning chores. Toller Jones strode up the path in a purposeful way, his hands knotted into fists. Along the road chugged the Fox car loaded with Milt and all his male-folks.

"Where's Martha?" demanded Toller, and Milt echoed the question.

Ad shook his head. They hit him. He hit back. This went on for some time until a deep, rich voice said:

" Whoa ! "

It was the Reverend Doxology Greenfield and beside him sat Martha. The girl jumped from the buggy and ran to help Ad.

" You leave him be ! " she screamed, scratching like a wild-cat at Toller and Milt and his male-folks.

" Well, make him leave us be," they protested, backing off.

Ad cleared away the blood and peered around until he located Martha, who was standing quite near him.

" Martha," he said, sore beaten but still determined. " Will you marry me ? "

" Yes, Mister Ad," answered the girl, soft and lovey. " I fetched the Reverend over to do the job."

Doxology got out his Book and looked benignly at Toller and the Foxes.

" Would you folks kindly act as witnesses while I unite this man and this woman in the bonds of holy matrimony ? "

Having no other choice, they agreed to witness the ceremony.

Brady arrived just in time to be best man.

XII

The Gardener

TAM RABBIE may have been young at one time, but in Willowdale we've always known him as Old Tam. He was past his prime when he first came to our town during the hungry depression, trudging along the railroad tracks with a bundle on his back.

"Can a man camp on the river bank withoot offendin'?" he asked our policeman.

Tam was granted permission, because Chief David is a shrewd judge of men and he sensed that this one was not a hobo by choice, despite his dusty rags. Old Tam found a broken shovel and set about digging a cave-like hole in the clay bank above the flood line.

When he had ten feet squared out, he placed logs across the top and piled smaller brush over them before shingling the roof with a double layer of sod. The open front was faced up with driftwood logs and slabs of sandstone set in muddy clay and moss as mortar. He made a careful job of it, and the result was a surprisingly neat and weatherproof earthen shelter. The policeman found a discarded stove for Tam to use, then scrounged him an old iron cot and a few blankets.

"I havna any money," confessed Tam. "But perhaps you'll let me square the account wi' work?"

"There's no need to," protested the Chief. "This stuff cost me nothing at all. Another thing, there's an easy-chair in my garage you may be able to mend."

"Ay," nodded Tam, immensely grateful. "I'll come along wi' you to your home, and mayhap there'll be a gardening job I could do as a little return."

The policeman tried to make Old Tam forget about payment. It was past the first flush of spring and robins were nesting, while birch trees had hung out their lacy foliage and the sticky balm buds had burst into greenery. A good time for setting out forced flowers. Old Tam insisted on digging and hoeing and raking the policeman's plots, then knelt beside the dark earth and tenderly planted stocks and snapdragons, phlox and pansies, that the Chief always featured in his front yard.

"You know gardening," commented the policeman, who was well skilled in the art himself.

"I should," Tam explained. "For a while I had a greenhouse business. But people are no' able to buy

flowers when their bairns are hungry, so the mortgage was foreclosed. I've been wandering ever since, until I sighted your cosy toon wi' the sparkly river running alongside it. 'Tis a bonny place, this Willowdale."

Chief David looked again at the neatness of Tam's work. Then he excused himself and went across the street to the home of the Widow Masters, a wealthy lady with a large house fronting on Willow Creek. The Chief rapped on her door and told her about Tam Rabbie, knowing how fond she was of a good garden. When the policeman finally returned to his own yard, the old Scot had finished setting out the bedding plants and was staring around in a keen appraisal of the yard.

" 'Tis cheeky o' me to suggest it, but you could do wi' a rose shrub in yon corner and a flowering tree like a crab-apple over on this spot here to balance the yard."

The Chief stood beside the raggy tramp and listened to a brief lecture on landscape gardening, then agreed to send off to a nursery for the plants.

" I'll ask your help to put them in when they come," he said, as he guided Tam indoors where Mrs. David had prepared a cup of tea with lots of thick meat sandwiches and good cake. The policeman had a hunch that Tam was living on fish caught in the river and lamb's quarter greens gathered from the roadside, so he sat himself down with the older man and saw to it that he ate heartily.

" Now I've got a paying job for you," the Chief announced, taking Tam across to the Widow's place.

She gave him a doubtful glance, because the newcomer was poorly dressed and so hungry—thin and gaunt. Almost hesitating to suggest it, she mentioned that she wanted to have certain trees and shrubs pruned and thinned.

He shook his head.

" 'Tis too late, lady. The season's sap is high, and your trees would bleed out their life juices if we cut them now. You'll have to wait until the fall o' the leaf or early spring."

" But I'd like it done right away," she protested.

" Then I'm no' the man who'll do it for you," Tam declared bluntly. " I'll not have any part o' killing a fine batch of trees."

He turned to go.

Chief David put a restraining hand on the old man's arm and said :

" Tam's quite right, Mrs. Masters. It is too late for trimming, and I should have been honest with you myself and said so too. But how about that back lawn you wanted re-spaded ? "

Thus Old Tam became the town gardener, going from one plot to another throughout Willowdale and digging here and planting there. Despite the shortage of steady work and the dollar-a-day wages of the depression time, the conscientious old man always refused a job if it was not to his liking.

" 'Tis wrong," he'd argue. " I'll not be party to spoiling your yard wi' such a mistake. But if you'll not mind a wee suggestion, it could maybe be changed in this manner."

He'd get down on his knees and smooth a patch of soil, quickly sketching out a landscape plan that was much better than the owner's notion. Some people did not like his bluntness, for a garden is always a rather personal matter and often a front yard reveals something of the home-owner's personality or lack of it. Old Tam was soundly denounced at times, whereupon he would just smile a dour twist of a grimace and go calmly off to the next garden on his list. Others took his criticism in good part, realizing that the bluff old man was a better judge of gardens than any amateur. And in time the yards Tam tended became the finest gardens in town, so many of those who had first doubted his abilities were willing to change their opinions.

Old Rabbie went to a meeting of the Town Council one night, sitting at the back of the room on the bench reserved for petitioners who came at times to request a new cinder walk, a street-gravelling job, or perhaps a reduction of their taxes. Mayor Fred Oliver and the aldermen glanced curiously at Tam, though all were silent until the Town Clerk finished reading the minutes.

"Before we start the night's business," said the Mayor, after the minutes had been approved, "I see that Tam Rabbie has paid us a visit. Do you wish to say something to us, Tam?"

"Ay, I do." The Scot advanced to the Council table. "I'm thinkin' you folks in Willowdale have gotten awfu' familiar wi' trees, having so many growing

on the outskirts o' town. That's maybe the reason why you've not planted trees along the boulevards in the resident sections. But I'm wondering if you'd be willing to change your ways in this matter ? "

There was a murmuring among the aldermen, a scraping of feet, before Mayor Oliver gave an answer.

" Um ! It's not that we don't want trees, Tam. Right now we've got tight times upon us, and we're forced to put off any unnecessary spending of taxpayers' money until we can afford such luxuries as boulevard trees."

The aldermen nodded in agreement with this, but Old Tam shook his head and spoke again.

" You wouldna' need to spend a cent. Out on the river hills there's white birch growing wild and red willows in plenty. They could be planted along the boulevards at no cost at all."

" What about the labour ? " asked the Mayor. " The few men employed on our town crew can't be spared from essential road and water work. They can't go gathering trees and planting them."

" Och, that's why I'm here," said Tam. " I want to ask if ye'll sanction a planting plan for the boulevards. If ye will, I'm willing to get the trees and plant them in my spare time."

The aldermen fidgetted at this, not understanding that Old Tam was offering his services free of charge. When this point was made clear, in some wonderment they studied his plans. He had scaled out a street map and marked on it the varieties of native trees he wished to plant. Things like white birch, red willows, native

spruce, and silver berry ; even dwarf junipers and cinquefoil shrubs for streets where traffic was heavy and it would not be wise to plant tall trees to obscure drivers' view of intersections.

" But why are you willing to do it for nothing ? " asked Fred Oliver.

Old Tam had turned to leave, having secured their approval of his plan. At the Mayor's question, he produced one of his dour smiles.

" Ah, weel ; it'll make the toon look nicer, and it'll gi' me something tae do wi' my spare time after suppers ! "

That was the start of Tam's planting project for Willowdale's boulevards. He planned it all out at the very start and went at it methodically, street after street. Some of the aldermen helped by using their cars to pick up trees spaded from the wilds by Tam. At the end of his day's work in the town gardens, the old man came back from his river cave in the evenings to dig the holes and tramp in the sapling stock. Often the home-owners nearby came out to watch and to help with the work.

It wasn't done in a week or a month or a year. Tam's tree-planting stretched over a six-year period before he got every residential boulevard planted to his satisfaction. He would not set out any trees during hot weather, hence his planting season was limited to spring and autumn. That coincided with his busiest gardening time, yet it made no difference to Tam. You'd see him at his digging and watering and planting

until twilight deepened into dusk and the Whitethroat birds trilled their clear songs from the poplars next the creek. Few of us realized, until long afterwards, that Old Tam put all the money left over after paying for his meagre living needs into buying good nursery stock to augment the native tree varieties. Being a Scot, he was particularly fond of rowan trees and pines and these two species appeared on many a boulevard.

The *Willowdale Press* gave him a fine write-up. Inky Summers even wanted to have a picture taken of Old Tam to use as an illustration with the article about the boulevard improvement plan.

" 'Tis a kind thought," Tam said. " However, my face is no' as decorative as it might be, so we'll just forget that. But I'm grateful for your kind words."

" The town is very grateful to you, Tam, and as the trees grow larger and cast a pleasant shade in summertime, we'll be even more grateful."

The old Scot nodded briefly and went on with his gardening. By this time he had a regular list of customers and was busy all the daylight hours.

He no longer lived in the neat cave on the river bank. Chief David had seen to that change shortly after the boulevard planting had started. There was a weather-beaten two-roomed shack on a back street that had been empty for years and had become town property under the tax recovery Act. The policeman talked to the Mayor and aldermen one council night, suggesting that they grant Old Tam the right to live

in the abandoned shack as a way of showing some tangible appreciation for his boulevard work.

The Council did the thing properly, too. Someone donated two gallons of paint, then Cap Riley and Chief David wielded brushes to dress up the old grey boards. Kalsomine was supplied for the shack's interior, while Mayor Oliver's wife provided curtains for the two windows. Then the little building was brightened up with new linoleum and donated furniture to make it habitable. Chief David and the Mayor drove over to Tam's cave and asked him to accompany them back to town. Once at the shack Fred Oliver presented the key to Tam and told him it was Willowdale's way of returning a favour.

" 'Tis a fine toon," muttered the Scot, so deeply moved that he couldn't say another word.

He moved in, and the weedy lots around the old shack on the back street soon became a summer show place. Tam arranged a series of walks through the property with comfortable benches where people could sit and enjoy the colours and fragrance of the massed flowers he planted. He never erected a fence, nor did he scold a child for plucking a bloom.

Yet in his estimation this was not enough to repay the town for its kindness to him. The time came when he went before the Council once more with a sketch in his hand.

" 'Tis yon bit o' waste land on Crescent Avenue," Tam explained when invited to state his mission. " It's city property, the Chief tells me, and for years

it's been a dumping-ground for neighbourhood rubbish. I'd like tae clean it up and level it a wee and plant a few shrubs and trees, in the manner ye'll see in this plan."

They looked at the drawing and noted that only the corners were marked to be planted. Mayor Oliver asked what was to be done in the large space left in the middle of the waste lot.

"Och, that," mumbled Tam. "Weel, wi' your permission, I planned to build a few swings for the bairns, a see-saw, and mayhap a sand-box for the toddlers. On yon streets nearby there's no play space for kiddies and this empty lot would serve in that way. It'll cost nothin', for I've already made most o' the playthings in my spare time."

They told him to go ahead, of course. The Mayor ordered the work crew to help him clear off the rubbish and cart it away in the town truck, then the street scraper machine levelled the property. In a short time Tam had a few imported shrubs established and got busy putting up the play structures. Boy Scouts heard of the scheme; they came around after supper-time and worked with a will under Tam's direction to finish the project.

"That worked out just dandy," praised Chief David, clapping Tam on the shoulder as they watched the kiddies at play one evening. "I've walked all over town during the last few days, and I've spotted two more vacant lots that could be dressed up in this same way."

"Fine," nodded Tam. "Show them tae me, and I'll work on them in my spare hours."

"You've got no spare time left," protested the policeman. He argued that Old Rabbie had done enough in giving the town the idea and supplying trees for the first playground. The old man merely grunted in his dour way, asking for the location of the lots. He was ready to do all the work himself. However, Chief David spoke to Cap Riley about getting the fire brigade to help, while Fred Oliver discussed the matter with the aldermen. Half the town turned out to put those other playgrounds in shape. Old Tam insisted on providing all the rowan trees and fancy shrubs and he planted every one, though younger men dug the holes for him and carried pails of water to the nursery stock.

By this time everybody in town called him Tam; we almost forgot that he had a last name. Young and old liked to stop when meeting him on the street or mowing the lawn in front of Doctor Gray's house or trimming hedges for the Widow Masters.

"A nice day, Tam," we'd call.

"Ay, 'tis so," he'd answer. "D'you see the blue sheen o' the sky? It makes a bonny sight."

Sometimes he'd beckon us close to look at a lovely flower, show us where he had found a moth cocoon buried in a peony bed, or point out a warbler's nest in a saskatoon bush.

"Ah, weel; I must awa' back tae my work," he'd say after such a pause, and the bent old man would go briskly back to his spade or rake or hand trowel.

Perhaps we took him too much for granted, not

totalling all the long years of service to our town. The treed avenues ; the pleasant playgrounds for youngsters ; the public park he had made of his own premises around the little shack. Then there were all the flower beds scattered throughout Willowdale on properties he worked for others. Roses and flowering shrubs ; fine trees and blooming perennials planted so carefully by his gnarled old hands and tended lovingly to coax them into beautiful growth.

Chief David went to Tam's shack yesterday morning, because Benny Roche happened to mention that the gardener hadn't come around to tend his fruit bushes as promised. The old Scot was sitting on a bench at the back of his home. While his eyes were closed, you could tell that he had just finished admiring the blossoms on a Japanese plum that was in full bloom nearby.

We're taking him to the cemetery to-morrow. The Mayor is going to plant a Talisman rose at the foot of the grave, and we've started a collection for a memorial stone to be engraved with his name.

Reverend Tanner told Chief David that while a granite stone was a worthy project, he felt that we really did not need any marker for Old Tam in Willowdale.

" He put his own memorials on every street in town," said the minister. " So long as the trees grow and flowers bloom, we'll not forget Tam Rabbie."

XIII

Christmas Concert

MY daughter Nellie rushed home from school one snowy day and crossed the frozen creek to where I was chatting with Booker John. With dramatic tearfulness the little six-year-old told us there wasn't going to be a Christmas Concert.

" Oh, no ! " cried Booker, looking shocked. " My dear Nellie, it is your inherent right to have an annual chance to squeal with delight at a school Christmas party."

Nellie thought so too, and begged us to change the teacher's ruling.

"You have my sacred promise," said Booker in that booming voice of his. He put a mittened hand on his heart and bowed low before young Nellie, who stopped crying to watch. "To-morrow, I will personally call upon your teacher and use all the eloquence at my command to plead your case. Don't fret, Little Nell; you shall have your concert."

That was good enough for my daughter, who thanked him before rushing off to help her brother and sister build a snowman out behind the cow stable. I couldn't help feeling that Booker had built up her hopes too easily, and said so.

"Friend Pete," answered my neighbour, with no trace of modesty. "You gravely underestimate my powers of persuasion."

"Well, it just happens that I'm a member of the School Board, and Miss Graham, the teacher, asked the Board's permission to cancel the concert and we agreed. It's because of that measles epidemic we had last autumn which kept the kids out of school for two weeks. They're somewhat behind in their studies and Miss Graham felt that practising plays for a Christmas concert would put them even farther behind."

"Fiddle-faddle," snorted Booker. "I've caught only a distant glimpse of the beauteous young teacher, who was then in the company of that stalwart farmer, Doug Knowland. It seemed to me that she gave off an aura of starry eyes and moonlight moonings. It's my guess that she is too busy with romance to be concerned about concerts, plus the fact that she is a young and inexperienced teacher and is probably

frightened of the thought of standing up before the assembled parents and directing a Christmas party."

I didn't say so, but members of our School Board had unofficially expressed much the same ideas after Miss Graham had left our meeting. However, we'd had trouble enough getting a teacher to come to our remote school, hence we were doing our best to co-operate fully with Miss Graham. When she asked if she might drop the concert to concentrate upon the curriculum, we had little choice but to agree.

" She'll tell you that she's got the Board's blessing on her decision, then you're going to have Nellie in tears again."

" Not if I can help it," declared Booker. " I'll go wash my best shirt and coax your kind wife to iron it, which will permit me to dazzle Miss Graham with my sartorial elegance and thus I'll win an easy victory for Little Nell."

" Good luck, then," I said, smiling in spite of myself.

Booker John lives across the creek from us in a dilapidated log cabin that looks picturesque upon a piney knoll. I work my fool head off clearing the trees from this marginal land so that I can plant clover and barley and raise sheep and pigs and other produce. But Booker is like those famous lilies : he toils not. He spends his time a-fishing in the summer and reading at all seasons. He loves talking, too, and whiles away many an hour leaning on a fence and yarning with anyone who cares to pass the time in indolent chatter. Yet we could do with a few more loafers of Booker's

type, because he has all the time in the world to carve a wooden dolly for a wee girl or to make a bow and arrow for a boy. He finds satisfaction in sunsets and enjoys listening to bird songs, and life is wonderful as Booker knows it. Being his neighbour, I enjoy a part of the good things and my lady shares my fond regard for our happy and learned friend.

So we willingly fixed him up as handsomely as his middle-aged state of wear allowed. My wife sponged and pressed his one suit that had been new a long time ago, while I loaned him my best tie. Then he sallied forth on the mile walk down to the Pinehill School House to talk with the teacher.

"I hope he doesn't get too fond of her," said my wife as we watched him stroll away.

"Oh, there's no danger of that. Eleanor Graham is only a young chick."

"Yes, but she's an extremely pretty young chick."

"Well, she's practically engaged to Doug Knowland," I added.

"Not now. They've had a serious quarrel," my lady informed me. "They still speak politely, but she is nursing a broken heart and that's when a girl is most vulnerable to the blandishments of men."

I thought she was borrowing trouble, even though I knew well enough that Booker has always been susceptible to the fair sex. But our neighbour came back from the school looking decidedly fuzzy.

"Hahhhhhh?" he asked dreamily, when I wanted to know how he'd got on with the great plan of pleasing Nellie.

"I mean, about holding the concert?"

"Oh, that!" Booker snapped his fingers. "All settled, Peter. Arranged in a pleasant moment, and you can assure young Nellie that she will have her party. Eleanor— Miss Graham, that is, agreed with me at once on that score. A charming and beautiful young lady, isn't she?"

"A very pretty girl," I said, emphasizing the last word.

"Very, indeed," nodded Booker, looking dreamy again. "Also a blue-eyed blonde. Ahhhh— I must ask you to excuse me, Friend Pete, because I have certain problems on my mind and wish to cogitate upon them."

He removed my tie and handed it to me, then went with a blithe step across the well-worn path between our two properties. He was singing as he climbed the knoll to his cabin. I'm not an expert on music, but that song had a certain Juney lilt to it that made my spirits wilt. Booker John was in love again!

There is nothing wrong with love, except that Booker is the happiest man alive as a carefree bachelor. Often he has been smitten by the charms of eligible ladies, but always he has been spared the matrimonial tangle that would end his idyllic life of leisure. The plain fact of the matter is that he cannot support a wife and is completely unacquainted with any form of work that might earn him a living.

Before I could tell my wife, she came to me with news about the affair. Young Nellie had rushed home from school to report on the Christmas Concert. Booker had talked to the children, extracting a willing

promise from them to stay an extra half-hour after school hours so that they might practise plays and recitations for the programme. And Booker John had agreed to the teacher's request that he instruct the children in their parts.

" Nellie says that Miss Graham likes him very much," added my lady, frowning with concern.

Booker borrowed my good tie next day and the day after, and every day during the next two weeks. My wife pressed his shirts and clothing to help keep him looking his balding best, despite how she inwardly felt about an August and April romance.

" Personally, I'd call him a September specimen," I told her.

" Our Nellie says that Doug Knowland hangs around the school after hours, but she thinks that Miss Graham likes our Booker the best."

Booker began visiting Eleanor Graham after supper at her boarding-house on the adjacent farm. We heard from the landlady that Doug was a glum third party at these meetings, while Booker did most of the talking and Miss Graham did some enthralled listening. That I could well believe, having listened to Booker many a time. He talks good talk about the deep and hidden desires of the human heart and can make philosophy seem possible and personal.

" But he's much too old for her," I mourned.

My wife said : " The fact that Doug Knowland is still on hand is rather promising."

" Doug is a great hulking fellow, healthy as a horse

and just about as talkative. What chance has he got against Booker ? "

" Well, he's a boy and she's a girl," replied my lady. " Besides, our friend Booker is a sensible man at heart."

" Not when his own heart is concerned."

Fortunately the neighbourhood didn't realize what was going on. We were reminded of it all the time, because we had one of the principals of the eternal triangle as our near neighbour. And we were grateful that the teacher's landlady was not a gossip. Though it must be admitted that she and my wife compared notes daily throughout the hectic two weeks of the practising for the concert that brought Booker and Miss Graham together.

" It's gonna be a good concert," Nellie kept telling us. " Miss Graham says so, and so does Uncle Booker."

He has always been " Uncle Booker " to our children, and during the practice period he became known to all the kiddies by that name. Undoubtedly he was extremely good for them, too. If he happened to reach the school before the day's lessons were over, Booker John said a few words about geography or history, science or literature, that made those subjects come alive to the youngsters. The kiddies loved him, which was all very fine. The only trouble was that their teacher had copied their example.

Finally the last day of school before the Christmas holidays arrived. At evening, all the families in the district gathered at Pinehill School. Such excitement among the young ones ; such happy laughter from

all ! And the delectable Miss Graham, a honey blonde who was really a honey, dimpled a smile as she greeted every visitor. The beaming Booker, smiling like a successful statesman, acted as usher and guided husky farmers to tiny desk-seats designed for toddlers. Doug Knowland was there too. It was obvious that he was man-of-all-work for both Miss Graham and Booker, but he looked like a sad-eyed spaniel from whom someone had stolen a bone.

The school-house was Christmassy. An aromatic pine stood in a corner of the packed building, the tree brightly decorated with tokens made by the children. It was also liberally festooned with presents. Eleanor Graham had prepared a bag of goodies for every child, while the youngsters had drawn names from a hat and made little gifts for each other. The Chairman of the School Board, a jolly sort, had a Santa Claus mask and an old fur coat hidden in his car ; it was his pleasant task to distribute the presents at the end of the programme.

The teacher, blushing with nervous excitement, made a brief speech of welcome and then fluttered a hand at Booker. I could see him gazing at her with obvious relish. Not that anyone could blame him, because every man in the room was ogling her too. As master-of-ceremonies, Booker paid generous tribute to the talents of the teacher in planning the concert, and I was pleased that he also gave unstinted credit to Doug Knowland for faithful service throughout the preparations.

You know the pattern of a Christmas concert. The

children sing a number of carols, and our kiddies sang well. Little Ivor Bjornson recited " The Night Before Christmas," after which Dolores Jones played a mandolin solo. There was a hilarious play called " The Christmas Swag," which Eleanor and Booker had jointly authored for the occasion. The plot was how a scalliwag, played by the most cherubim-looking pupil in school, raided the district post office and stole all the Christmas parcels, but the evil chap reformed in time to behave like a true Santa and all ended happily. It was a better play than the average rural-school effort, hence we beamed proudly at our kiddies as they acted out their parts. Then they sang again and we sang with them, followed by more recitations and solos until it was time for the final number.

My wife had helped copy Booker's design for the costumes needed ; they were called Burnooses and were white mantle affairs with hoods. All over the room the children were donning those Eastern costumes.

Booker John had made an artificial palm tree, which Miss Graham placed in the cleared space opposite the Christmas tree. Doug Knowland rolled down a couple of old maps as a backdrop ; the teacher and Booker had painted a plausible-looking Biblical setting on those discarded maps.

The children gathered in a group, sitting on the floor in front of the scenery, while Doug put out all the lights but one. It shone from the top of the Christmas tree in the form of a twinkling star.

" What's the meaning of this bright star in the east ? " asked our Nellie in her treble-high voice.

" What's all this talk about wise men ? " asked little Freddy Smethurst.

" And Who is the Baby, lying in a manger ? " asked Jane Haskell.

It was natural sounding, setting the scene of that bygone time in a prattle of childlike questions. Then, as the star shone brighter, the kiddies chorused :

" Let's ask Uncle the meaning of these things."

We couldn't see Booker John, but we could hear him. He has a grand voice, yet it wasn't only that. Suddenly the play-acting was over and this was the real story of Christmas.

> And Mary brought forth her first-born son,
> and wrapped him in swaddling clothes,
> and laid him in a manger ;
> Because there was no room for them in the inn.
> And there were in the same country
> shepherds abiding in the field,
> keeping watch over their flock by night.
> And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them,
> and the glory of the Lord shone round about them,
> and they were sore afraid.
>
> And the angel said unto them,
> Fear not, for behold,
> I bring you good tidings of great joy,
> which shall be to all people.
> For unto you is born this day
> in the city of David
> A Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.
> And this shall be a sign unto you ;
> Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes,
> lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel
a multitude of the heavenly host
praising God, and saying
Glory to God in the highest
and on earth
Peace and goodwill toward men.

We had all heard those words before, from ministers and priests and from our own fathers and mothers. Read from the Bible on Christmas Eve, when we were young ones ourselves and round-eyed with the marvellous wonder of the season. We knew the words. Some of us had forgotten their exact sequence, but we knew their message. It is an old and beloved story, cherished in the heart.

There in that little school-house, with our own young folk gathered before us in the garb of people of the Holy Land, and with good friends and neighbours near us, we felt again the true miracle that is Christmas. When the lights went on, there seemed to be many lights in that school-room. My wife's eyes were shining in a lovely way ; all around us friends were sharing the same experience. There was no clapping for this play. We were hushed and reverent and stood with bowed heads when the kiddies sang a hymn about a silent and holy night of long ago.

It was Doug Knowland who broke the spell, and nicely.

" A Happy Christmas, everyone ! " he called. We saw him with an arm unashamedly around Eleanor Graham as they stood near the decorated tree. At sight of them we knew that here were two young

people very much in love. It was a good time for love and we wished them well.

Afterwards, Booker John rode with us back to our home. The children were babbling with joyous talk, but Booker said little. We had a bite of cake and a sup of tea, then I went outside with him and we stood quietly a moment and looked at the snowy spires of pine and spruce reaching upwards towards a star-dotted sky.

I told him : " It was a wonderful concert, thanks to you."

Booker sighed before speaking.

" It was a beautiful interlude for me, and I'm sorry that it is now over. This is the first time during my many enchanting contacts with the ladies that I have been called upon to play the difficult role of peace-maker. As reward, I am to give away the bride next Monday. At that time I will get a loving kiss from a very lovely girl. Don't you envy me, Friend Pete ? "

I did, too.

XIV

Jubilee Meeting

"UM!" said Fred Oliver, Mayor of Willowdale. "Ladies and gents." He twiddled his fingers gleefully, as though counting the people crowded into the town hall. "When I put out the handbills about holding a public meeting to organize a jubilee here in town, I expected half a dozen fellows like our good friend the Reverend Tanner, Chief Tom David, and maybe Mr. Smathers and Judge Benn would show up to-night and we'd sit around sociable-like with our feet on the table and swap ideas. I'd no idea that we'd pack the hall like this, and I'm at a loss to know how

to start this meeting. But before I left home I took the liberty of making an outline of a programme, which I have here——"

Shrewd politician that he was, the Mayor sensed the unfavourable reaction of the restless crowd and promptly put the paper away.

" Um ! Mind you, I don't mean for a single minute that you must follow my notions about this, because that's why we called this meeting to-night. We're here to arrange a jubilee. Um. A fiftieth anniversary golden jubilee of the settling of our town. Here and now I declare this meeting open for suggestions as to how Willowdale should celebrate the occasion."

The Mayor settled his ample self in the arm-chair behind the platform table. For a brief instant there was a tense silence, then there was a sudden rustling of quick movement. A dozen people stood up.

" Well, Mr. Chairman, I think we should——"

" My vote goes for a bandstand ! "

" How's about a buffalo barbecue ? "

" Hey, Fred ; we need a swimming-pool."

" I move we start a museum of historical items."

" Say, who's got the floor ? "

" You haven't."

" Siddown ! "

" Mr. Chairman ! "

Fred Oliver heaved himself upright again and reached for a glass-enclosed snowstorm-scene paper weight, which he banged robustly against a brass collection plate. The contenders hushed for an instant and looked up at the noise-making Mayor.

"I figure that Mrs. Benny Roche beat the rest of you up by a full quarter second at least," said the elected head of our town. "You others just sit down and let Mrs. Roche do the talking for a spell."

Mrs. Roche awarded him a smile of thanks, then rustled the sheaf of notes held ready in her right hand. After clearing her throat in a lady-like way, she began.

"Mr. Mayor and fellow citizens, I am here to represent, as president thereof, the thirty-two members of the Willowdale Women's Club, and we've been talking over this jubilee celebration for a real long time. Many worthwhile projects have been suggested at our meetings, and when we held a vote on which was best, it was unanimously decided on the third balloting that we should build a statue."

"Who of?"

"Yuh mean one'a them Venus nood wimmen things?"

Fred Oliver hastily banged the glass snowstorm against the brass plate and yelled for order.

"You still got the floor, Mrs. Roche," he then ruled.

"Thank you. Well, as I was saying, we voted for a statue. Personally, I favour a statue of a farmer standing next a stook of wheat, because this community depends on farmers as customers for our stores and professional services and we shouldn't ever forget it. I claim that a noble-looking stone-piece showing off a farmer and a few sheaves of No. 1 Northern Wheat is a good enough statue for any western Canadian town, but some of the ladies of our club think it'd be better

to have a progress abstract type of statue. It's a modern art idea, something that would suggest what we've already accomplished in Willowdale during the past and maybe what we hope to do in the future. Then there's one other strong faction of our membership who feel that the statue should be an actual likeness of some prominent citizen of our fair town."

"Will Devlin!" shouted a voice.

There was a ripple of laughter, followed by a shocked silence as though even the laughers were reproving themselves.

"Will Devlin?" repeated Mrs. Roche. "Red-headed Will? Why, now! I realize, of course, that Mr. Devlin was the very first man to settle here on what's since become the Willowdale township, and he did come fifty years ago to fit in with that part of the jubilee notion, but all the same——"

Mrs. Roche stopped talking. The crowd stayed silent with her as everybody called to mind the homely visage of Red Will. Mr. Devlin wasn't the resourceful pioneer of Western tradition; he couldn't even snare enough rabbits or shoot enough prairie chicken to keep his frying-pan busy during his homestead days. When a second settler arrived Will gratefully became a hired man and served in that capacity on various valley farms. Then he got into business for himself by means of a spice and patent medicine van pulled by a decrepit horse. When that venture failed, Will tried shoe-repairing for a while and transferred to janitor work when the leather soles he mended persisted in coming undone from the shoe uppers. During the

last few years the ageing but still spry Will kept a flock of chickens on the outskirts of town and depended on egg sales to keep him in modest funds.

The very thought of Will Devlin's wrinkled grin being immortalized in stone was too much for Mrs. Benny Roche.

" Well, anyhow, our Women's Club voted for a statue and that's the idea I was to bring up at this meeting." With that, she shoved her wad of notes into a pocket and sat down.

The Reverend Tanner nicely smoothed over the awkward aftermath. He paid tribute to the kindly character of Will Devlin and knew that everyone in the hall had a warm-hearted affection for Willowdale's first resident. At the same time, we all knew that farmers had not enjoyed the best of harvests last season and money was therefore scarce throughout the whole district. Hence an expensive piece of sculpture might not be entirely suitable as a jubilee feature at this time. In fact, he had discussed the matter with several citizens prior to the meeting and believed there was a majority feeling that the jubilee monument should be of some practical value to both townsfolk and country people.

" Hear ! Hear ! "

There was a round of clapping as the popular minister sat down.

" A bandstand park ! " someone shouted.

" Naw ! We need a public rest-room."

" Better yet, a real good swimmin'-pool ! "

It was Mrs. Vic O'Brien who gained the floor, and she briskly stated :

" This town and district urgently needs a good library. I move we consider a public library as a jubilee monument of the practical sort that Parson Tanner suggested."

" Aw, Jenny—people don't read books any more. They've got TeeVee ! "

" You know as well as I do that we're out of television range here in Willowdale, so we can still read books for a while longer. Besides, some of us prefer good books to the average TV programme."

" Yes, but wouldn't we have the expense of a librarian's salary in addition to the initial cost of building a library and buying books to stock it ? It sounds too dear, Mrs. O'Brien."

" A bandstand park is more practical."

" I wanta move that we barbecue a couple hind quarters of buffalo."

" It isn't lasting enough, Cressman. We want something that'll be sort o' permanent."

Another voice said : " Evidently you don't know the lasting qualities of a tough old bull buffalo steak ! "

Fred Oliver clanged the paper weight against the plate.

" Um ! Now, friends, let's not get all mixed up Seems to me that Mrs. O'Brien has put a motion before the meeting about us considering a public library as our jubilee project. Does anyone want to second her motion ? If so, do it now and I'll call for a vote."

"Wait a sec, Fred. Let's hear some other ideas before we get to voting. Personally, I'd like to suggest a bandstand be built smack in the middle of the Town Square, with comfortable benches around so's we could hold Saturday night concerts all summer long."

"Hey!" protested Cap Riley. "We play baseball there on the Town Square. You wanna ruin our diamond?"

"Hold on, now. If it's time for motions, I move we build a real good swimmin'-pool."

"That's too expensive, Pete. They built one over in Vicksburg that cost seventy thousand dollars, and now they've got a whomping debt that'll plague 'em for twenty years. I ask you, where'd a small place like Willowdale get hold of seventy thousand dollars?"

"Mr. Chairman, the last speaker has indirectly raised a very important aspect of this whole matter. Whatever we decide to do about celebrating our jubilee, where are we going to get the money?"

Fred Oliver banged the durable snowstorm-scene against the collection plate and stood up.

"This plate thing I'm holding provides the answer to that question," he stated. "You folks will have to pay the bill, and don't ever forget it. Um! Maybe the Town Council might grant a little cash toward expenses, but that comes out of taxpayers' pockets too. I believe we should pass this plate around the hall here and now to find out what sort of funds we'll have to work with on this jubilee business."

He ceremoniously opened his wallet and deposited a

crisp bill on the collection plate before handing it over to the Town Clerk, who flushed hotly and muttered that he had left his purse at home but he'd be glad to contribute later on. The Clerk lost no time passing the plate down from the platform to the nearest citizen, who hastily threw on some assorted silver and shoved the plate against his neighbour's cringing chest.

Fred Oliver eyed the proceedings sternly and banged for attention.

"Here and now I urge all you folks to give as generously as you can, 'cause this jubilee is a big thing and it's bound to cost us plenty. Um! Dig deep, friends, and give a lot!"

The plate journeyed from hand to hand during an almost ominous silence, as though each doner was being closely scrutinized and judged. Twice the plate had to be brought back to the platform and emptied on the table. The Town Clerk shed his jacket, rolled up his sleeves to show that he could conceal nothing, then set about counting the take.

"Mr. Chairman, we're putting the trailer before the truck," said Cec Farlow of Farlow's Transport Service. "I agree we must collect money, but I also think we should know what the money's to be spent on. Is it a library, a bandstand, or a buffalo barbecue such as Cressman keeps yelling about?"

"Well, that's what we're here to decide, Cec," answered Fred Oliver, and palmed out a sheet of paper. "Um! I mentioned earlier that I'd drawn up a little schedule. Not that I'm trying to foist off my own ideas on you folks, but maybe we could do

with a bit of planning now. To start with, I've written down that the jubilee day should be declared a public holiday for schools and business folk in our town, and I'm sure that you'll all agree with that notion. Then there's got to be a sort of outline of events, and at the top I've jotted down the word parade. How do you folks feel about holding a jubilee parade ? "

" Oh, sure ! Get the Cree Indians to dress up in feathers and buckskins and come over from their reservation to lead the parade."

" Could we maybe borrow a red-coated Mountie from somewhere ? "

" Looky, folks. How's about getting that tame cow Smethurst owns, the one his kids hitch up to the buggy and drive around their farmyard ? We could pretend that cow is an ox, see, 'cause a lot of pioneer farmers ploughed with oxen around Willowdale when they first came."

" Another thing, we should get some nice-lookin' ladies to put on those old-fashioned crinoline dresses and sit up on a fancy float near the head o' the parade. If it hadn't been for women pioneers a lot of us wouldn't be here to-day."

" Hear ! Hear ! "

" Does anyone know where we could get one o' them brass-bound cars like they manufactured fifty years ago ? "

" Yeah, and we should have an old steam tractor with a big smoke stack belching black wood smoke ! "

Fred banged the paper-weight on the table, startling the Town Clerk so much that he spilled a handful of

silver on the floor and had to get down on his knees to retrieve it.

" Okay, folks," smiled the Mayor. " It's definite that you'd like a parade as part of the big day, and the details can be worked out later. Next we should settle where we parade to, and why. Here on my sheet of paper I've written down an item about holding a public picnic. Seems to me it would be nice and friendly if we all packed lunch hampers and held a sort of monster picnic rally at wherever it is we want to rally. How d'you feel about a picnic ? "

" Will you guarantee good weather and lots of fierce red ants ? "

" We could hold it in the fairgrounds, Fred. There's the kitchen facilities there, where we could make coffee and tea and dish out free ice-cream and pop to the kiddies. If we went to the fairgrounds, we could always go into the grandstand for shelter if it rained."

" Wait up, there ! Who's paying for all the free coffee and ice-cream you're so keen on giving away ? "

" Oh, don't quibble ! Surely we can afford to hand out some free eats on our fiftieth anniversary."

" Hear ! Hear ! "

" Order, ladies and gents," called Fred Oliver. " Order, please. Um ! I can't find my paper-weight hammer, because it's all covered with money here on the table. But I can tell plain enough that you favour the public picnic idea, so it'll be made part of the general programme. I've also got written down here—mind, now, these are only suggestions and you folks have the final say-so. But I've got down the

word Entertainment. By that I mean some concert or platform show to keep us interested. Maybe we should have somebody like Booker John come and give us a good historical talk that fits the occasion. Then we can have the Willowdale Band playing music between events, but we'll need quite an assortment of items to round out a good programme. How about it?"

"Get Booker, for sure."

"Hey, Fred—how about Mike O'Flynn's daughter Kathleen doing an Irish jig, huh?"

"We'll need to get a bagpiper, too."

"Now, look! Here's where that buffalo barbecue stunt comes in. We could get a couple of Hereford hindquarters and pretend it's buffalo, and barbecue it and slice it up to make free sandwiches to go along with the coffee and ice-cream and make it a real old-time sort of picnic."

"Cressman's got a good idea there, Fred."

"If you're going to get a Scotty to play the bagpipes, then I move we also get Pete Popovitch to play the 'Maple Leaf Forever' on his water-pipe whistle."

"No, no!" the music-loving Chief protested. "Not that squally boomer!"

"Order, friends. Where's that blasted paper-weight thing? Um! Well, I can see that you approve of us having entertainment, so we'll just tick that off and get a committee to look after it later. But we still have to figure out some single big feature, a special memorial or project on which we can hang the whole jubilee celebration. It'll likely cost us a bit of money,

and here and now I'd like to ask our Town Clerk how much money was donated this evening ? "

The Clerk had called on Judge Benn to check the counting. Both men were now leaning back in their chairs, looking well pleased. At the Mayor's query the Town Clerk started to rise to make the report, then changed his mind and waved a hand towards the Judge, who shook his head in a smiling way and indicated that the Clerk was to go ahead. So the Clerk cleared his throat and said :

" Ladies and gentlemen, the collection totals three hundred and seventy-eight dollars fifty cents, which works out to about one dollar 50 cents per person here to-night. I'd like to add one further word, which is : Bravo ! "

There was a round of applause.

" Well, it ain't enough to build a swimmin'-pool, that's for sure."

" It'd nearly pay for a small bandstand, though."

" It would make an excellent start on a library fund," put in Mrs. O'Brien.

" How about founding a museum ? The people around here could donate some mighty interesting relics of bygone days. I've got a candlestick-maker myself, and I know where there's a spinning-wheel in good order and also a flint-lock gun. Why not put the money into creating a historical show-case for all to see in the years to come ? "

Mrs. Benny Roche was on her feet again, looking as if she had a duty to perform and intended doing it.

"Mr. Chairman, as president of the Willowdale Women's Club, I feel you should know that the statue-piece we had in mind as a jubilee monument was not any cheap-John affair. We did some pricing around and learned that we could get a pretty fair statue for only five thousand dollars or thereabouts."

"Whew!"

"I move we forget about statues, Mr. Mayor. Times is too tough."

"But we should select something permanent," protested Mrs. Roche. "It's only once every fifty years that we hold such a celebration, and we should certainly mark it with something that'll last. I wish to point out that a stone statue is very durable. Why, some of those famous statues over in Europe have been standing for a thousand years or more, and here in Willowdale——"

"Who wants to look at Will Devlin on a pedestal for a thousand years?" demanded a voice.

Mrs. Roche muttered something about farmers and sheaves of grain, but her words trailed off and she sat down once more.

Cec Farlow said: "Mr. Chairman, we've collected three hundred and seventy-eight dollars and fifty cents, and I for one want to know what's going to be done with it?"

"How much did you give, Cec?"

Fred Oliver had a firm grip on the snowstorm paper weight, while the collection plate was once more empty and handy. He banged them together robustly and stood up.

"This is your problem, folks. I take it you don't favour a seventy thousand-dollar swimming-pool nor even a five thousand-dollar statue. But kindly remember that this three hundred and seventy-eight dollars and fifty cents isn't all the money we're going to have, because the Town Council may make a grant towards the celebration like I said earlier. Some business firms aren't represented here to-night, and a lot of farmers couldn't get in on account of bad roads, so it's quite likely that we'll have a few more donations before the jubilee day comes due. Which means that we can set our sights a little higher than the three hundred and seventy-eight dollars and fifty cents we have now, though I certainly agree with our Clerk that it is a generous start. But as Cec says, the next thing to discuss is what we are going to spend it on."

Before the bandstand could be extolled or the historical museum plan given another airing, there was a commotion at the back of the hall.

"A fire, you say?"

"—his hen-house. No time to call the brigade."

"What about Will?"

"—in hospital."

"Eh, what's that? Is Red Will hurt bad?"

Fred Oliver rapped for order.

"Oh, it's you, Doctor Gray? Um! What's all that talk back there about someone being hurt?"

Bill Gray advanced to the platform and smiled around at the gathering. In his quiet way the doctor described the flash fire that had just destroyed Will Devlin's chicken coop. Will had valiantly dashed into

the flaming building to open the windows and toss out the squawking hens.

" He saved most of his flock, but he got burned while doing that rescue work. I've just dressed his hurts and believe he'll be up and around in a week or two. Meanwhile, Will needs his friends to go gather up his scattered hens. Those birds haven't any shelter, either, because the old coop is a total loss."

There was a clucking of tongues, a murmuring of sympathy, and several men stood up and moved towards the aisle. Suddenly Mrs. Benny Roche's voice shrilled out loud and triumphant.

" Mr. Mayor, that three hundred and seventy-eight dollars and fifty cents you got on the table right now— I move we spend it to build our good pioneer, Will Devlin, a brand new chicken-coop ! "

Reverend Tanner yelled : " Second the motion ! "

Fred Oliver smiled all over his round face and asked : " All in favour ? "

There was a cheer of approval.

" Then I declare motion carried. We better adjourn at once and go catch Will's hens for him. And here and now I want to say that we've chosen a fine jubilee monument. Let's make it the very best hen-coop in town ! "

XV

The Silver Bugles

EVERY time Remembrance Day comes due in Willowdale some of us remember Little Sam. His full name was Sam Ellsworth, but even young ones called him Little Sam. He was just a boy in size, though he was a man in age and had fought in the First War. It was his job to sound the bugle at the monument on Remembrance Day. Back in those days a few years after that other war, we called it Armistice Day.

Little Sam's bugle was pure silver; his regiment had given it to him over in Flanders. Every Armistice

Day he'd stand off a little to one side of the flag-pole, facing the monument, and his face was bright pink and his eyes seemed bleary. When the preaching was done and the soldiers had fired off their blank cartridges and everything was still, Sam would make his bugle ring out clear and sweet. The piece was called "The Last Post." It's a sort of ceremonial piece played at close of day, and at army funerals.

"Look at him!" people would whisper. "Just look at Sam now!"

"He can't even stand straight, this time!"

"It's a disgrace!"

That's the talk you would hear from the bystanders. But the men in line there, farmers and townsmen who had been off at the war, they'd stand stiff at attention with their faces solemn and listen to Little Sam sound his bugle. Us kids would listen carefully too, because we knew about bugle playing from being in our band and we all knew that Little Sam was a marvellous bugler. Some of the women in the crowd, those that weren't whispering, would be crying softly and dabbing at their eyes with handkerchiefs. We boys used to think it was because of the fine way Sam sounded that bugle, making the music go searching off to the far hills.

"You'd think Reverend Greenfield wouldn't allow it," the talkers said. "It spoils the whole service."

Then you'd hear someone sob, in between the ring and echo of the silver bugle's notes. No question of it, Little Sam was easily the finest bugler in Willowdale. Though some boys thought that Cholly Cram

was even better. Cholly was our patrol leader in our Boy Scout troop ; we had the best bugle band in our part of Alberta and that's how we came to know something about bugling music. Our band had twelve bugles in it, four with attachable crooks that made them into trumpets for playing two-part pieces. For timing, there were three snare drums and two kettle drums and a bass. Nowadays the Scouts learn about woodcraft and camping, but back there after that First War there were lots of bugle bands among Boy Scout groups. Some mothers did not like their boys belonging to the Scouts, because of the bugles and all the marching and drilling.

" They're training them to be soldiers ; they're getting them ready for another war ! "

That's what they said, back when we were kids. Some mothers would not let their boys belong to our group, and fellows like Cec Farlow and Bobby Devlin and Frew never did join up. However, most of us wanted to be in Bandmaster Morton's Scouts, and get a chance to play in the bugle band. After more than a year of practising, we competed with all other bands in our part of the province and we won top prize. Cholly was our best bugler. Cholly's dad was Dr. Cram and Mayor of Willowdale back in those early days before young Bill Gray became the town doctor. Dr. Cram was a rich man and had Cholly taking cornet lessons from a teacher who came all the way from Vicksburg once a week. Those cornet lessons helped Cholly a lot. He could make his bugle ring out wonderful, and I was proud to be in his particular

patrol of Scouts. Some fellows said that Cholly was the best bugle player in Willowdale, bar none ; even better than Little Sam Ellsworth. But on Armistice Day, Sam's silver bugle sounded away different from any ordinary bugle music.

" He's pretty far gone this time," we'd hear someone whisper.

" Think of the terrible example it sets for all these youngsters."

They'd look at us boys ; we'd be staring at Little Sam and listening with close attention. We'd be lined up in full uniform. Sometimes they used us to lead the parade from the Town Hall over to the monument, and we'd play our bugles as we marched. But once at the monument, Little Sam got the job of sounding " The Last Post " with his silver bugle. " The Last Post " is a fine but sad piece of bugle music, and it always used to make my stomach feel empty in a way that almost hurt.

" He's not playing for us," I heard one farmer in the crowd behind us whisper.

" No, not for us," agreed his friend.

I turned and looked at them. They had come late and for that reason couldn't be with the returned soldiers all lined up near the monument. I thought they meant that Little Sam wasn't playing for them because they were late, and that he played only for the lined-up men. Yet that didn't make sense, for everybody could hear the bugle music go ringing across the town valley. I remember how Reverend Greenfield, the old town minister before Parson

Tanner's time, would stand with his head bare and bowed while Sam played.

" It's disgusting," muttered a woman.

" Shhhhhh ! " said the two farmers. They sounded angry.

Little Sam was night man at the Savoy Hotel. Our good hotel is called the Willowdale House and is located right on main street at the busy corner. The Savoy was older, kind of run-down, and a cheaper place to stay. Being night man there wasn't a busy sort of job, but some folks said it was all the work that Sam could handle. He'd tried farming and had worked on the railroad and once he was taken on at the wholesale grocery, but he wasn't much good at any of those jobs. So at last, mostly because the fellow who owned the Savoy had been in the last war with him, Little Sam got the job of being night man there. This meant he had to sweep floors and empty those old-fashioned spittoon things, answer any night bells, and wake up anyone who wanted to catch the early-morning mixed train. It wasn't any bargain of a job, yet Sam didn't need much to keep him busy. He was all alone, with no family and no one but himself to worry about. He never spent much money on clothes, because he always wore a kind of raggy jacket and an old black hat and baggy, shiny blue pants. For working, he wore bib overalls because cleaning up was a dirty job.

" The Chief should stop him," some folks said. " Sam's spending every cent he makes on that stuff."

" Look at him sway. He's apt to fall down any minute."

Little Sam never did actually fall while he was there at the monument. He always played " The Last Post " right through without a fumble, though it's a long piece and takes a lot of memory to get it right. We'd all listen, the soldiers at full attention, the mothers crying, and us boys keen on hearing that good bugle solo. Since the Armistice ceremony was held on November Eleventh, sometimes the weather was dull and there might even be snow on the ground, but there were times when the sun was shining and it made that silver bugle glow brightly and dazzle our eyes.

Bandmaster Morton had a silver bugle too. He'd been given it by our fathers and mothers for leading our Scout band, after we had won the prize for being the best bugle band in our part of Alberta. Bandmaster Morton didn't play much on the bugle, because he was really a drum man himself. Of course he knew all the pieces and he'd play them for us slow and careful to teach us how they went. Pieces like " General Salute " and " Monkey on the Table," " Home Fires," and all the order calls like " Reveille " and " Cookhouse Door," and " Fall-in." We met in the basement of the fire hall to do our practising. In summer-time we'd sometimes march around the town streets during the evening and sound our tunes while the drummers beat time for marching between pieces. We knew eighteen pieces all told, which is considered quite a

good list for a bugle band. They always got us to lead the Dominion Day parades and play at the summer fair, and often we'd lead the harvest parade at Thanksgiving-time. We all had uniforms by this time and our bugles had fancy green and gold cords on them, while the drums were decorated with green and gold pompoms so that we looked like a pretty snappy outfit. The people enjoyed seeing us go marching around the town streets, sounding our bugles, while Bandmaster Morton walked behind the flag carrier with his silver bugle at ease on his hip.

Little Sam Ellsworth often watched us march past. He'd come to the door of the Savoy Hotel, maybe with a broom still clutched in his hand, and he'd watch while we trooped past and listen to us play. As an extra, Bandmaster Morton sometimes let Cholly Cram play a solo piece. Cholly knew a lot of extra pieces which the rest of us never learned. The drummers would play the regular drum solo and then kind of fake in a tattoo background while Cholly played his lone pieces. Cholly could make that bugle ring out on the long notes and stutter sharply when he made the fast triple-tongue notes. A lot of boys claimed that Cholly was a much better player than Little Sam. I didn't think so. I remembered how Sam's "Last Post" made me feel hollow inside as he sounded his silver bugle on Armistice Day.

"These we will never forget," Reverend Greenfield used to say. He said it every year just before he ended up the service with a prayer. Then the rifles cracked out their blank shells and, when all was hushed again,

Sam would give his mouth a quick wipe with the back of his hand and raise his silver bugle and sound "The Last Post." Some of the women cried every year during the last part of the service. Some of the returned men would cry too, though we always pretended not to see them doing that. Once in a while even us kids would have a hard time to keep from being sissies about crying. It wasn't that we understood what it was all about: it was just that Little Sam's bugle music did something to us as the clear notes went ringing across the hills.

Then the Armistice Day came when Sam wasn't standing there near the flag pole. We were all lined up as usual and the Reverend Greenfield had given his sermon and spoke a little prayer. When he finished that part, just before Captain Knowland gave the nod to the sergeant in charge of the rifle-firing party, the minister left his place and he and the Captain had a few words together. They came over to speak to Bandmaster Morton. The next thing we knew, Cholly Cram walked over and stood beside the flag pole, looking kind of proud. He stood there with his bugle resting on his hip, while Captain Knowland nodded to the sergeant and the rifles banged off their blanks and then Reverend Greenfield made a little signal to Cholly.

So Cholly Cram played "The Last Post" that time.

"It's a big improvement," said a lady behind us.

"I should say so," said another.

The rest of the crowd stayed quiet, except for the

men who were lined up. The returned soldier men, I mean ; the farmers and townsmen who were all stiff at attention in front of the monument. Some of them seemed to sob ; we could hear them all the way over to where us Scouts were standing.

Yet this time none of us had any trouble about being sissies and wanting to cry. Cholly Cram played that " Last Post " piece exactly right. I've studied it in our bugle music-book and followed the notes over one by one, and I'm positive that Cholly got every note just right in place and time. But it sounded like ordinary bugle music, the same as when we played at our weekly practice night.

" Where's Little Sam ? " I wanted to know.

" Shhhhhhh ! " said Bandmaster Morton. " Hush up, back there ! "

We stood quiet and listened to Cholly sound the bugle. I heard a man whisper that Sam must be pretty bad this time and they should go find him. Then a lady said that they should have Cholly sound the bugle every year from then on. Well, it was good playing ; yet the last notes died away right there at the monument, and not away off across the hills like they did when Little Sam played.

When it was all over the Scouts marched back to the basement of the fire hall to get dismissed. Bandmaster Morton told us to show up after lunch for the sports, because we'd been asked to play our bugles. It was a sports contest for the whole district and was going to last all afternoon.

" Tell your folks that you'll get supper after the

games," Bandmaster Morton said. "The committee offered us a free feed as thanks for our playing. And remember this : there's to be no shenanigans from any of you."

Then I got word about the silver bugle. Right after we had been dismissed Bandmaster Morton grabbed me and said he'd promised to lend a bugle to a friend in Vicksburg. They wanted it for playing at their Armistice Supper. I guess Mr. Morton didn't want to lend his silver bugle out of town, nor he couldn't lend Cholly Cram's fancy one, because Cholly owned it himself. But my troop-owned bugle was the next best in the whole band. We had drawn numbers for the instruments and I'd been lucky and got the best of the troop-owned bugles. I kept it slick and shiny and hadn't marred it with a single dent. Bandmaster Morton took it to lend his friend and said he'd give me his silver bugle to play that afternoon ; he said I could take it home to keep in practice until my own was returned.

" And if you drop it, or scratch it, or hurt it in any way whatsoever, I'll skin you alive ! "

I promised to take extra good care of it, and raced home for dinner and was first back at the basement, even though we lived a whole mile from town. The time came to line up to march to the sports grounds, and that's when Bandmaster Morton handed me his silver bugle.

Well, I couldn't tell how it sounded with eleven other bugles all blowing around me. I was disappointed about not being able to hear it, but finally

the afternoon finished and we had our free eats and got dismissed.

" Don't ill-use my good bugle," Bandmaster Morton cautioned me again. " Troop : 'shun ! Practise that ' Monkey ' piece all week, because some of you are skipping notes. There's a parade next week we have to play for, so you'd best practise all the pieces and be sure to come early at the next meeting. All right. Troop : Dismiss ! "

Seems like every friend I had wanted to chum with me right then, on account of me having the Bandmaster's bugle. Even Cholly Cram wanted to blow through it. But I lived farther out than any of them and at last I was alone on the road and tenderly carried that beautiful instrument.

" I'll go up to the hilltop," I decided. " I'll go up to the top of Piper's Mount and play every piece I know."

Piper's Mount is the highest hill close to Willowdale town. It was a little to one side of the road to my home, but that didn't matter to me ; it wasn't every day that I got my hands on a silver bugle. The sunset was still bright with crimson on the clouds that were fluffed off in the west. The town was nearly a mile away, below the Mount and in the valley. I could see dust rising from the sports grounds road as people went home in cars and wagons, and there was the shine of Willow Creek and the mass of dark spruces growing on the river banks at the far side of town. Nearly all poplar and birch trees had dropped their leaves at this late fall day, while stooks were cleared

from the wheat fields and big straw stacks were heaped high amid the empty stubble. It all looked pretty in the evening sun, and I felt real good as I raised up the silver bugle to play.

Then I saw Little Sam Ellsworth. He was right on the crest of the hill, lying flat on his back with his hands folded behind his head. His silver bugle was on his chest, and that's what I saw first. Sam's eyes were fastened on me, so I lowered my bugle right away.

Little Sam sat up.

" Go ahead and sound it," he urged.

I shook my head, feeling like I'd been caught showing off. Little Sam waited a moment, then reached out and took Bandmaster Morton's bugle and asked how I came to have it. He held the two bugles side by side. You could tell at once that the Bandmaster's bugle was almost brand new. Even so, Sam's bugle looked better somehow, though the silver didn't shine so brightly as on the dress-up bugle.

Then he glanced at me.

" Do you ever play from the hill here ? "

" No, sir. Well, only once. That was when I first got my bugle. I came up here to try it, but I couldn't play a note."

" And to-night was another special occasion, and you wanted to try out this silver bugle, eh ? "

" Yes. I played it this afternoon with the band, but I wanted to hear how it sounded alone."

" It's the right idea," said Sam. " I come here often, just to sound my bugle."

That surprised me, because I'd never heard him play from the hill and our farm was close by. I told him that, whereupon he smiled and balled up a hankie and pushed it into the bell-end of his bugle.

"That's why you don't hear me," he explained.

"But why muffle it?" I demanded. "Shucks, your bugle would sound wonderful from this hill top."

Little Sam's face kind of changed. For a moment he didn't speak and kept his eyes down on his own bugle. He'd already handed the other one back to me.

"Were you at the monument this morning?" he asked at last.

"Yes, sir."

"Did they—? Well, who sounded 'The Last Post'?"

"Cholly Cram, sir."

Little Sam nodded.

"I thought it must be him. I could hear it from here."

"Why didn't you come yourself, sir?"

He rubbed the back of his hand over his mouth.

"Sonny, I shouldn't ask you this, but did you hear any of the people whispering about me as they usually do?"

I shifted my feet, hesitating. At the end I blurted out a lie and said no, I hadn't heard any whispers.

Sam smiled.

"Thanks, boy," he murmured. "I knew they would, and they've got a right to do some whispering. I know that. I've weighed it all out long before this,

for and against myself. To-day I've been at it ever since morning."

I didn't know what he was talking about, except that he knew I had lied about the whispers.

" Only, those people who talk— They haven't the memories. Some of the men know what I'm thinking about when I sound my bugle there at the monument. They know why I have to nerve myself up with a bottle. I've played that piece over the graves of the finest men I'll ever know. One time, back at the first of the war, before bugles were banned at the front, I played ' The Charge.' Our boys went out and got licked. That evening I sounded ' The Last Post,' after playing the call that sent them out to die."

He wasn't speaking to me ; he seemed to be trying to explain something to himself.

" Of course, it was nothing I could change in any way. But every time I stand there at the monument, every time I raise up this silver bugle that some of those fine buddies gave me, I've got to nerve myself to do it right."

" Well, you sure play it good," I said, and meant it.

Little Sam raised his head and looked at me again.

" Thanks, sonny. Say, d'you happen to know ' The Last Post ' ? "

" Well— Yes, I do. Though I've never played it anywhere except just at home."

Little Sam got up. He stood about my height, even though he was a grown man and had been off in the war. He took my arm and led me over to the

edge of the hill, where we could best see Willowdale. By this time the sun had gone and dusk was coming on fast. Street and house lights were starting to wink on in the town, while the creek had faded into darkness and only nearby things showed plainly to our eyes.

" Did Reverend Greenfield say those words again ? " Sam asked. " You know the ones : ' These We Will Never Forget ' ? "

" Yes, sir."

Little Sam nodded and swung up his bugle. Then he lowered it and spoke to me again.

" Aim your bugle at the sky, sonny. Aim it at that red cloud up there. See it ? Come on ; we'll play ' The Last Post ' together."

I raised that bugle, feeling kind of eager and proud to play along with him. Perhaps I missed the first note or two, but Little Sam's music didn't fumble or falter. I joined in the best I could, and those two silver bugles sent out the clear, sad notes ringing across the valley, across the hills, going straight towards the red cloud that marked where the sun had sunk behind the far-away mountains.

When we finished we could hear the echoes come back, clear and sweet and beautiful. The red cloud turned golden for a small moment, then it was dark.

" Remembering isn't hard," Sam said, like he was once more talking to himself. " That's easy enough for those who care. But it's hard to keep the promises, and everybody made promises about peace and all the good things to come from peace."

He sent me home then. All along the way I seemed to be hearing that sky-aimed music ringing in my ears.

I never saw Little Sam again. He went away, leaving his silver bugle here in Willowdale at the returned soldiers' club. They keep it in a velvet-lined glass case, but they get it out once a year to sound "The Last Post."

THE END

[*continued from front flap*

and while there dined on brook trout, strawberries and cream, supplied by friends—even Judge Benn brought him a basket of fruit.

But this gives no real picture of the book. Kerry Wood writes with a deep compassion for his fellow-men, a warm understanding of human nature. Many of the sketches are humorous, for he has an original and ready wit. He balances this with pathos that brings one close to tears in stories such as "The Dark-Eyed Doe," the story of a deer, blind from birth, who becomes the concern of the whole village, and in "The Silver Bugles," the story of a beery, down-and-out old soldier who played the Last Post at the Armistice Day services. All in all, this warm, human book is a superb example of the writer's craft.

Kerry Wood, a Scottish free-lance writer, lives in Red Deer, a small town in the Alberta foothills. He has written seven books, all published successfully, including two novels. He won the Governor-General's Award for Juvenile Literature in 1955. He is well known for his many short stories and articles that have appeared in many different languages in periodicals throughout the world.

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